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FALL 2010

## CELEBRATING OUR WOMEN

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AUTHOR
**JACQUELINE WOODSON**

QUEER BLACK CINEMA'S
**ANGEL BROWN-ROSS**

ACTIVIST
**DARLENE NIPPER**

PHOTOGRAPHER
**ZANELE MUHOLI**

RAPPER
**ACE REIGN**

ALSO
**GLO TV**
**BRIAN SLADE**
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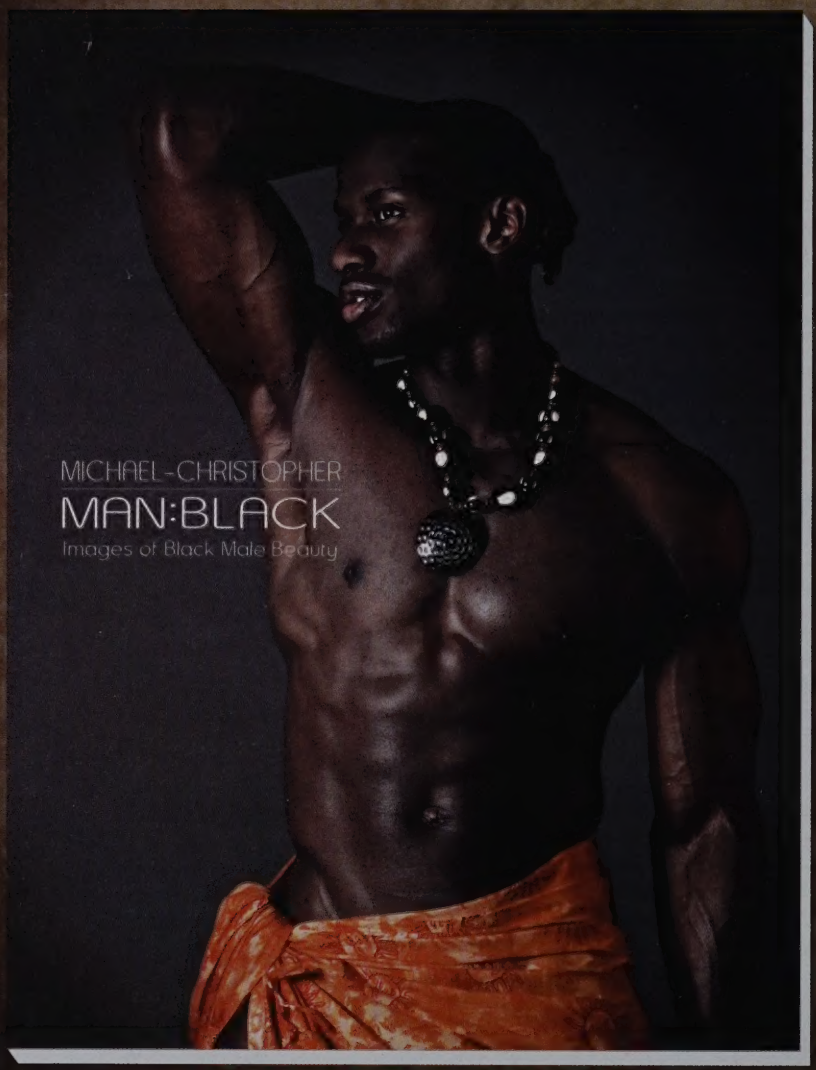
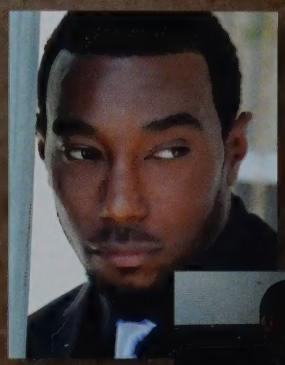
MC BOOKS

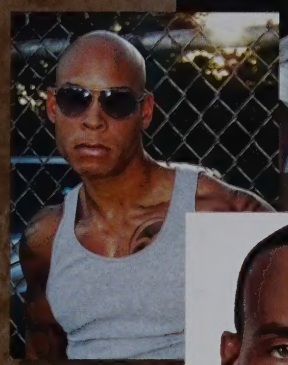
# MAN:BLACK

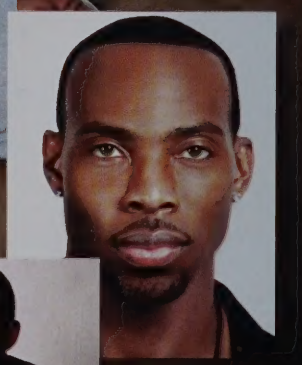
## Images of Black Male Beauty

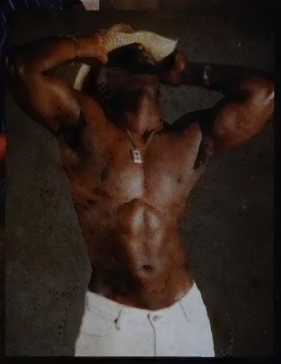
### Photographs by Michael-Christopher









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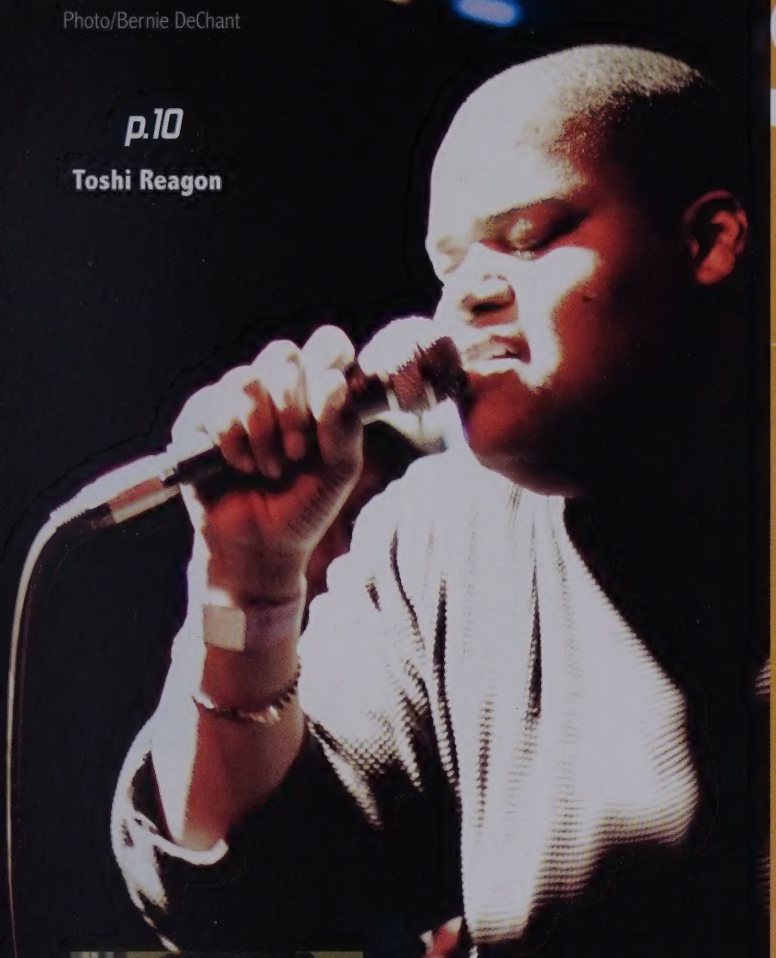
Black never looked so good! Michael-Christopher has captured the true essence of the ebony male in his first collection of artistic photographs. Simply titled, *MAN: BLACK*, this full color, 100-page collection features breathtaking images illustrating the sensuality and strength of black men.

Join the Michael-Christopher Fan page on Facebook for updates and signings and visit www.michael-christopher.com to order now!

Photo/Bernie DeChant



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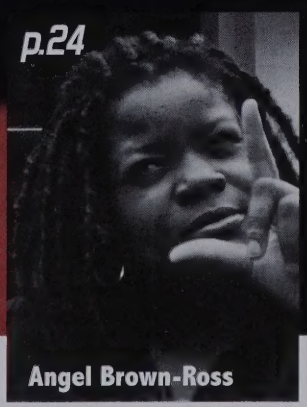

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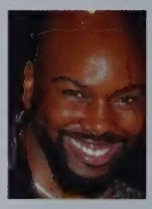
# contributors

Clarence* J. Fluker is a freelance writer and blogger based in Washington, D.C. His work has appeared in a variety of print and online publications including *ARISE* magazine, where he served as Next Generation editor. His essay, "A Nation Divided," appears in the acclaimed anthology *Spirited* from RedBone Press. Fluker earned his undergraduate degree from Morgan State University and his graduate degree from American University.

Steven G. Fullwood is a writer living in Harlem. He was the recipient of the 1972 Martin Luther King Jr. School Trophy for Writing in Cursive as a kindergartner.

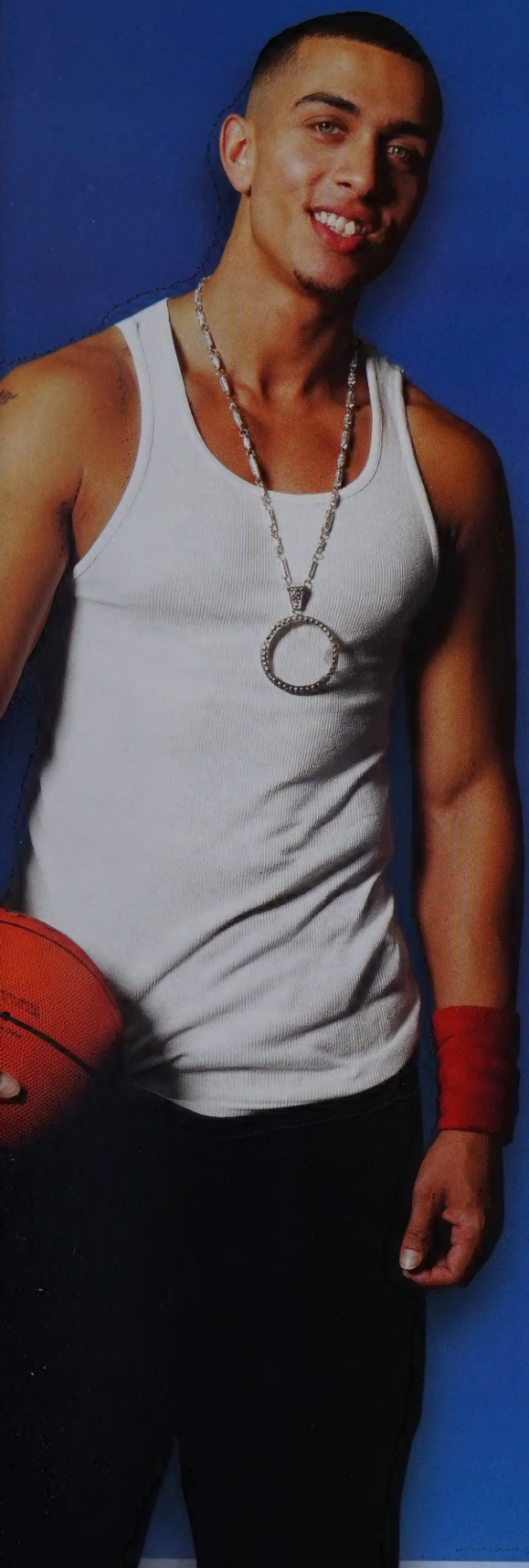


L. Michael Gipson is an Oakland-based cultural critic, community health planner and award-winning youth advocate. His sociopolitical essays have been published in two anthologies, including *Poverty & Race in America: The Emerging Agendas* (Chester Hartman, ed.). As a cultural critic and music journalist, Gipson's work has appeared in *Clik*, *Pulse*, *Arise*, *Pride*, *Amplify*, *Urban Dialect*, *Port of Harlem* and *Creative Loafing ATL*. He is editor and columnist at www.SoulTracks.com and heard weekly as "Cornfed" on *The Dave Brown Radio Show*.

Lisa Joyner is a freelance writer/editor, activist and a producer on WPFW's LGBT radio show, *Inside Out*, in Washington, D.C. Her recent work includes poetry in the anthologies *Growing Up Girl: A Manifesta* and *Just Like a Girl*. She lives in Washington, D.C.

Dede Newby's artistic and creative abilities became apparent at an early age. After an English professor took a personal interest in her writing talent, Newby began to work seriously on improving her writing skills. Newby landed her first freelance assignment with *Qmocha* magazine, then got a freelance position with *Qnotes*, a biweeky paper distributed throughout North and South Carolina. Newby then accepted a position with South Carolina Black Pride as the publicity coordinator where she wrote business articles, blogs, public releases and e-mails and several pieces concerning essential news, politics, organizational and community events. To express herself more artistically, Newby writes short stories which can be found on imfromdriftwood.com.

Washington, D.C. native Yardé Noir began Genesys Productions before graduating from Duke Ellington School of the Arts in 1997. Noir went on to Bennett Career Institute majoring in hair and make-up, lending his talents as an experienced cosmetologist. Noir has worked as a make-up artist for Smashbox Cosmetics and Pretty by PR, and sits on the artistic team for Joya Cosmetics. Noir is the 2008 Elite Beauty Make-Up Competition Winner. Noir also attended the Art Institute of Washington majoring in graphic design and is currently pursuing a master educator's license.



# Day 1

## Of my next treatment regimen: KALETRA once a day with my other HIV medicines.

## Ask your doctor if KALETRA once daily is right for you.

KALETRA once daily should not be given to children. KALETRA once daily should not be taken with efavirenz (Atripla® and Sustiva®), nevirapine (Viramune®), amprenavir (Agenerase®), nelfinavir (Viracept®), carbamazepine (Tegretol® and Epitol®), phenobarbital (Luminal®), or phenytoin (Dilantin®). There may be a greater chance of getting diarrhea with the once daily regimen compared with the twice daily regimen.

**Use**

KALETRA® is a prescription anti-HIV-1 medicine called a protease inhibitor that contains lopinavir and ritonavir. KALETRA is used with other anti-HIV-1 medicines to increase the chance of treatment response in people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-1) infection. It is not known if KALETRA is safe and effective in children under 14 days old.

KALETRA does not cure HIV-1 infection or AIDS and does not stop you from passing HIV-1 to others. You may still get opportunistic infections or other conditions that happen with HIV-1.

**KALETRA Safety Considerations**

Do not take KALETRA® if you are allergic to any of its ingredients, including lopinavir or ritonavir. Do not take KALETRA with certain medicines, as they can cause serious problems, death, or make KALETRA less effective against HIV. Some patients taking KALETRA can develop inflammation of the pancreas and liver problems, which can cause death. Patients may develop changes in heart rhythm, large increases in triglycerides and cholesterol, diabetes, high blood sugar, changes in body fat, and/or increased bleeding in people with hemophilia. Some patients may develop signs and symptoms of serious infections they already have after starting anti-HIV medicines.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088 (1-800-332-1088).

If you cannot afford your medication, contact: www.pparx.org or call the toll-free number (1-888-4PPA-NOW) or (1-888-477-2669) for assistance.

For additional information about KALETRA, call 1-866-KALETRA (1-866-525-3872) or visit KALETRA.com.

Please see Brief Summary on adjacent pages.

Model is for illustrative purposes only.

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039-403017 June 2010 Printed in U.S.A.

KALETRA®
(lopinavir/ritonavir)

# KALETRA® (kuh-LEE-tra) (lopinavir/ritonavir) Tablets
# KALETRA® (kuh-LEE-tra) (lopinavir/ritonavir) Oral Solution

**CONSUMER BRIEF SUMMARY**
**CONSULT PACKAGE INSERT FOR FULL PRESCRIBING INFORMATION**

## Patient Information

Read the Medication Guide that comes with KALETRA before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment. You and your doctor should talk about your treatment with KALETRA before you start taking it and at regular check-ups. You should stay under your doctor's care when taking KALETRA.

### What is the most important information I should know about KALETRA?

**KALETRA may cause serious side effects, including:**

- **Interactions with other medicines. It is important to know the medicines that should not be taken with KALETRA.** Read the section "What should I tell my doctor before taking KALETRA?"
- **Changes in your heart rhythm and the electrical activity of your heart.** These changes may be seen on an EKG (electrocardiogram) and can lead to serious heart problems. Your risk for these problems may be higher if you:
  - already have a history of abnormal heart rhythm or other types of heart disease.
  - take other medicines that can affect your heart rhythm while you take KALETRA.

Tell your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms while taking KALETRA:

- dizziness
- lightheadedness
- fainting
- sensation of abnormal heartbeats

**See the section below "What are the possible side effects of KALETRA?" for more information about serious side effects.**

### What is KALETRA?

KALETRA is a prescription anti-HIV medicine that contains two medicines: lopinavir and ritonavir. KALETRA is called a protease inhibitor that is used with other anti-HIV-1 medicines to treat people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-1) infection. HIV-1 is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

It is not known if KALETRA is safe and effective in children under 14 days old.

### Who should not take KALETRA?

- Do not take KALETRA if you are taking certain medicines. For more information about medicines you should not take with KALETRA, please see **"Can I take other medicines with KALETRA?" and consult with your doctor about all other medicines you take.**
- Do not take KALETRA if you have an allergy to KALETRA or any of its ingredients, including ritonavir and lopinavir.

### What should I tell my doctor before taking KALETRA?

**KALETRA may not be right for you. Tell your doctor about all your medical conditions, including if you:**

- have any heart problems, including if you have a condition called Congenital Long QT Syndrome.
- have liver problems, including Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C.
- have diabetes.
- have hemophilia. People who take KALETRA may have increased bleeding.
- have low potassium in your blood.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if KALETRA will harm your unborn baby. Birth control pills or patches may not work as well while you take KALETRA. To prevent pregnancy while taking KALETRA, women who take birth control pills or use estrogen patch for birth control should either use a different type of birth control or an extra form of birth control. Talk to your doctor about how to prevent pregnancy while taking KALETRA.
- take KALETRA during pregnancy, talk with your doctor about how you can take part in an antiretroviral pregnancy registry. The purpose of the pregnancy registry is to follow the health of you and your baby.
- are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed if you are taking KALETRA. You should not breast-feed if you have HIV-1. If you are a woman who has or will have a baby while taking KALETRA, talk with your doctor about the best way to feed your baby. If your baby does not already have HIV-1, there is a chance that HIV-1 can be passed to your baby through your breast milk.

**Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take**, including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Many medicines interact with KALETRA. Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your doctor or pharmacist. Your doctor can tell you if it is safe to take KALETRA with other medicines. Your doctor may need to change the dose of other medicines while you take KALETRA.

### Medicines you should not take with KALETRA.

**Serious problems or death can happen if you take these medicines with KALETRA:**

- ergot containing medicines, including:
  - ergotamine tartrate (Cafergot®, Migergot, Ergomar, Ergostat, Medihaler Ergotamine, Wigraine, Wigrettes)
  - dihydroergotamine mesylate (D.H.E. 45®, Embolex, Migranal®)
  - ergonovine, ergonovine and methylergonovine (Ergotrate, Methergine), ergotamine and methylergonovine
  - Ergotrate Maleate, methylergonovine maleate (Methergine)
- triazolam (Halcion®), midazolam hydrochloride oral syrup
- pimozide (Orap®)
- the cholesterol lowering medicines lovastatin (Mevacor®) or simvastatin (Zocor®)
- sildenafil (Revatio®) only when used for the treatment of pulmonary arterial hypertension. (See "Medicines that may need changes" and "What are the

possible side effects of Kaletra?" for information about the use of sildenafil for erectile problems.)
- alfuzosin (Uroxatral®)

**Medicines that you should not take with KALETRA since they may make KALETRA not work as well:**
- the herbal supplement St. John's Wort (hypericum perforatum)
- rifampin (Rimactane®, Rifadin®, Rifater®, or Rifamate®)

**Medicines that may need changes:**
- birth control pills that contain estrogen ("the pill") or the birth control (contraceptive) patches
- certain anticancer medicines, such as nilotinib (Tasigna®) and dasatinib (Sprycel®)
- certain cholesterol lowering medicines, such as atorvastatin (Lipitor®) or rosuvastatin (Crestor®)
- certain other antiretroviral medicines, such as efavirenz (Atripla® and Sustiva®), nevirapine (Viramune®), amprenavir (Agenerase®) and nelfinavir (Viracept®)
- anti-seizure medicines, such as phenytoin (Dilantin®) carbamazepine, (Tegretol®), phenobarbital
- medicines for erectile problems, such as sildenafil (Viagra®), tadalafil (Cialis®), or vardenafil (Levitra®)
- medicines for tuberculosis (TB), such as rifabutin (Mycobutin®)
- inhaled steroid medicines, such as fluticasone propionate (Flonase®)
- inhaled medicines such as salmeterol (Serevent®) or salmeterol in combination with fluticasone propionate (Advair®). Your doctor may need to change to a different medicine
- medicines for gout, such as colchicine (Colcrys®)
- medicines to treat pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), such as bosentan (Tracleer®) or tadalafil (Adcirca®)
- pain medicines, such as fentanyl (Duragesic®, Ionsys™, Fentora®) and methadone

**If you are not sure if you are taking a medicine above, ask your doctor.**

## How should I take KALETRA?

- Take KALETRA every day exactly as prescribed by your doctor.
- It is very important to set up a dosing schedule and follow it every day.
- Do not change your treatment or stop treatment without first talking with your doctor.
- Swallow KALETRA tablets whole. Do not chew, break, or crush KALETRA tablets.
- KALETRA tablets can be taken with or without food.
- If you are taking both Videx® (didanosine) and KALETRA:
  - didanosine can be taken at the same time as KALETRA tablets, without food.
  - take didanosine either one hour before or two hours after taking KALETRA oral solution.
- Do not miss a dose of KALETRA. This could make the virus harder to treat. If you forget to take KALETRA, take the missed dose right away. If it is almost time for your next dose, do not take the missed dose. Instead, follow your regular dosing schedule by taking your next dose at its regular time. Do not take more than one dose of KALETRA at one time.
- If you take more than the prescribed dose of KALETRA, call your local poison control center or emergency room right away.
- Take KALETRA oral solution with food to help it work better.
- If KALETRA is being used for your child, tell your doctor if your child's weight changes.
- KALETRA **should not** be given one time each day in children. When giving KALETRA to your child, give KALETRA exactly as prescribed.
- KALETRA oral solution contains a large amount of alcohol.
  - If a young child drinks more than the recommended dose, it could make them sick from too much alcohol. Contact your local poison control center or emergency room right away.
  - Talk with your doctor if you take or plan to take metronidazole or disulfiram. You can have severe nausea and vomiting if you take these medicines with KALETRA.
- When your KALETRA supply starts to run low, get more from your doctor or pharmacy. It is important not to run out of KALETRA. The amount of HIV-1 virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time. The virus may become resistant to KALETRA and become harder to treat.
- KALETRA can be taken with acid reducing agents used for heartburn or reflux such as omeprazole (Prilosec®) and ranitidine (Zantac® ) with no dose adjustment.
- KALETRA should not be administered once daily in combination with carbamazepine (Tegretol® and Epitol®), phenobarbital (Luminal®), or phenytoin (Dilantin®).

Avoid doing things that can spread HIV infection. KALETRA does not stop you from passing HIV infection to others. Do not share needles, other injection equipment or personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them, like toothbrushes and razor blades. Always practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom to lower the chance of sexual contact with semen, vaginal secretions, or blood.

## What are the possible side effects of KALETRA?

**KALETRA can cause serious side effects.**
- See **"What is the most important information I should know about KALETRA?"**
- **Liver problems**. Liver problems, including death, can happen in people who take KALETRA. Blood tests in people who take KALETRA may show possible liver problems. People with liver disease such as Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C who take KALETRA may have worsening liver disease. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these signs and symptoms of liver problems:
  - loss of appetite
  - yellow skin and whites of eyes (jaundice)
  - dark-colored urine
  - pale colored stools, itchy skin
  - stomach area (abdominal) pain.
- **Inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis)**. Some people who take KALETRA get inflammation of the pancreas which may be serious and cause death. You have a higher chance of getting pancreatitis if you have had it before. Tell your doctor if you have nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain while taking KALETRA. These may be signs of pancreatitis.
- **Increases in certain fat (triglycerides and cholesterol) levels in your blood**. Large increases of triglycerides and cholesterol can be seen in blood test results of some people who take KALETRA. The long-term chance of getting complications such as heart attacks or stroke due to increases in triglycerides and cholesterol caused by protease inhibitors is not known at this time.
- **Diabetes and high blood sugar (hyperglycemia)**. Some people who take protease inhibitors including KALETRA get new or more serious diabetes, or high blood sugar. Tell your doctor if you notice an increase in thirst or urinate often while taking KALETRA.

- **Changes in body fat**. Changes in body fat in some people who take antiretroviral therapy. These changes may include increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck ("buffalo hump"), breast, and around the trunk. Loss of fat from the legs, arms and face may also happen. The cause and long-term health effects of these conditions are not known at this time.
- **Increased bleeding for hemophiliacs**. Some people with hemophilia have increased bleeding with protease inhibitors including KALETRA.
- **Increased risk of certain problems when you take medicines used for the treatment of erectile problems such as sildenafil (Viagra®), tadalafil (Cialis®), or vardenafil (Levitra®) with KALETRA:**
  - **low blood pressure**. If you get dizzy or faint, you need to lie down. Tell your doctor if you feel dizzy, or have fainting spells.
  - **vision changes**. Tell your doctor right away if you have vision changes.
  - **penis erection lasting more than 4 hours**. If you are a male and have an erection that lasts longer than 4 hours, get medical help right away to avoid permanent damage to your penis. Your doctor can explain these symptoms to you.
- **Allergic reactions**. Skin rashes, some of them severe, can occur in people who take KALETRA. Tell your healthcare provider if you had a rash when you took another medicine for your HIV infection or if you notice any skin rash when you take KALETRA.

Common side effects of KALETRA include:

- diarrhea
- nausea
- stomach area (abdominal) pain
- feeling weak
- vomiting
- headache
- upset stomach

These are not all of the possible side effects of KALETRA. For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Tell your doctor about any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

## How should I store KALETRA?

**KALETRA tablets:**

- Store KALETRA tablets at room temperature, between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C).
- Do not keep KALETRA tablets out of the container it comes in for longer than 2 weeks, especially in areas where there is a lot of humidity. Keep the container closed tightly.

**KALETRA oral solution:**

- Store KALETRA oral solution in a refrigerator, between 36°F to 46°F (2°C to 8°C). KALETRA oral solution that is kept refrigerated may be used until the expiration date printed on the label.
- KALETRA oral solution that is stored at room temperature (less than 77°F or 25°C) should be used within 2 months.
- Keep KALETRA away from high heat.

Throw away any medicine that is out of date or that you no longer need.

**Keep KALETRA and all medicines out of the reach of children.**

## General information about KALETRA

KALETRA does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS. The long-term effects of KALETRA are not known at this time. People taking KALETRA may still get opportunistic infections or other conditions that happen with HIV-1 infection. Some of these conditions are pneumonia, herpes virus infections, and *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC) infections.

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a Medication Guide. Do not use KALETRA for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give KALETRA to other people, even if they have the same condition you have. It may harm them.

This Medication Guide summarizes the most important information about KALETRA. If you would like more information, talk with your doctor. You can ask your pharmacist or doctor for information about KALETRA that is written for health professionals. For more information about KALETRA call 1-800-633-9110 or go to www.KALETRA.com.

What are the ingredients in KALETRA?

Active ingredient: lopinavir and ritonavir

Inactive ingredients:

**KALETRA 200 mg lopinavir and 50 mg ritonavir tablets:** copovidone, sorbitan monolaurate, colloidal silicon dioxide, and sodium stearyl fumarate. The film coating contains: hypromellose, titanium dioxide, polyethylene glycol 400, hydroxypropyl cellulose, talc, colloidal silicon dioxide, polyethylene glycol 3350, yellow ferric oxide 172, and polysorbate 80.

**KALETRA 100 mg lopinavir and 25 mg ritonavir tablets:** copovidone, sorbitan monolaurate, colloidal silicon dioxide, and sodium stearyl fumarate. The film coating contains: polyvinyl alcohol, titanium dioxide, talc, polytheylene glycol 3350, and yellow ferric oxide E172.

**KALETRA oral solution:** acesulfame potassium, alcohol, artificial cotton candy flavor, citric acid, glycerin, high fructose corn syrup, Magnasweet-110 flavor, menthol, natural and artificial vanilla flavor, peppermint oil, polyoxyl 40 hydrogenated castor oil, povidone, propylene glycol, saccharin sodium, sodium chloride, sodium citrate, and water.

**KALETRA oral solution contains 42.4% alcohol (v/v). "See How should I take KALETRA?".**

KALETRA Tablets, 200 mg lopinavir/50 mg ritonavir
Manufactured by Abbott Pharmaceuticals PR Ltd., Barceloneta, PR 00617
for Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, IL 60064, U.S.A.

KALETRA Tablets, 100 mg lopinavir/25 mg ritonavir and KALETRA Oral Solution
Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, IL 60064, U.S.A.

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This Medication Guide has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Ref: 03-A387-R8
Revised: June, 2010
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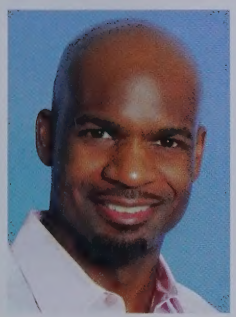

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# From the Editor

This issue of *SWERV* is dedicated to the wonderful lesbians of the black LGBT community. Just as in general society, women are often overlooked in the gay community, but lesbians have been just as influential in politics, art, music, sports, health and education. They are on the front lines fighting for equal rights, same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws.

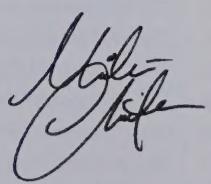
Musician Toshi Reagon has been making noise in the music industry for nearly 30 years and has shared the stage with superstars such as Nona Hendryx, Elvis Costello, Ani DiFranco, Lizz Wright and Me'shell NdegéOcello. She comes from a musical family, so talent was in great supply—which is the sole reason Toshi has survived both the wavering music industry and the notion that only soul-singing divas can make it.

Out author Jacqueline Woodson has written an astounding 30 books, won multiple awards and gained attention and praise along the way. Her books deal with issues like teen pregnancy, tolerance and race. And to think this amazing writer began writing from telling stories as a child—but not "once upon a time" stories; as she puts it, "outright lies." It was those tall tales which led to her wonderful body of work.

Zanele Muholi, the world-renowned South African photographer, bravely documents LGBT issues in Africa where being gay can be deadly. Muholi's work has been shown in Johannesburg, Milan, Lagos and, soon, São Paulo. Aside from capturing images, this trailblazer has worked as community relations officer for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) and reporter for e-zine *Behind the Mask*.

Film buff Angel Brown-Ross took her passion for the movies and created the Queer Black Cinema (QBC) International Film Festival in Harlem, which takes place this October. Angel has also launched a new LGBT magazine called *Cinematiq*.

Also in this issue, learn about up coming rapper Ace Reign; and Steven G. Fullwood looks at the lives of effeminate men. So call your best girlfriend and enjoy *SWERV*'s celebration!



Michael-Christopher
Editor-in-Chief

# BIG, LOVELY AND THRIVING: TOSHI REAGON (+ ONE)

Words/L. Michael Gipson
Photos/ Bernie DeChant

*Toshi Reagon has been a preternatural force in the music business over the last three decades. Since her 1990 debut,* Justice, *the unconventional Reagon has been pushing the boundaries of what is socially and commercially acceptable for black women artists, especially one who's been openly lesbian since day one. Despite being born of an enviable pedigree as the daughter of Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, Reagon's rise was anything but a foregone conclusion. In an era of Lycra jumpsuits, big weave and manufactured vocals, Toshi Reagon came along as a dreadlocked, full-figured blues, folk and rock singer whose voice had all the power of the ancestors.*

*Despite the long odds, Reagon survived over scores of black female artists who have come and gone in those years. Nine solo albums, several production credits and the launch of her own label imprint later, Reagon is hotter than ever—from performing for President Barack Obama to co-producing Lizz Wright's forthcoming album,* Fellowship. SWERV *had the chance to catch up with the Big Lovely entrepreneur to get the lowdown.*

***SWERV: Your mother founded Sweet Honey in the Rock, your father [Cordell Hull Reagon] was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) civil rights icon who also co-founded the Freedom Singers with your mother, and folk legend Pete Seeger was your godfather. As a girl had you ever considered being anything other than a socially conscious musician?***

**Toshi Reagon:** I thought I would be an athlete, particularly a football player. I love football. I love sports. Yankees/Jets/Knicks/Liberty—my favorite baller is Kevin Garnett. I was raised by my mom, who raised me to be whatever I wanted to be, who loved me completely, and worked her ass off so that I had a wide-open space to look at in terms of what was possible for me. She listened to me when it was clear that I was heading toward music. She was incredibly supportive. I am into rock. My early bands were Labelle, Zeppelin, Kiss, Black Sabbath, Fleetwood Mac, and, yes, she would slip a few blues records in so I would know where that music came from. Big Mama Thornton, Big Bill Broonzy, Howlin' Wolf—these are masters of all things musical in American pop music, hip-hop, dance, folk, metal and whatever. My mom is good people.

***SWERV: How did you secure your first record deal?***

**TR:** I have just been informed by the writer Eva Yaa Asantewaa that I have been doing this for almost thirty years. Yikes! I say, really? She wrote my most current bio. I have the same spirit and bright eyes for music that I ever had. My first record was on the old folk label, Flying Fish. They gave me no money. They just put out what I had already done. Soon after, I was opening for Lenny Kravitz's first world tour. Flying Fish was good folks, but they could not do anything in terms of supporting an artist; I got the tour on my own. After that, I was signed to Elektra Records. That record never came out, but I met Nona Hendryx, my favorite member of Labelle. She became one of my music mothers, along with my mom and the rock guitarist and producer June Millington.

***SWERV: How does performing a spiritual or field song resonate for you when compared to a folk or rock song?***

**TR:** I do all kinds of music. It all has to feel right coming out of my mouth. I don't fake anything. I don't lie about the sound I can make with my body. It is the most sacred thing I have other than breathing. My mom talks about black people being kidnapped from home and sold into slavery. What is it that we held on to? The sound we make. The sound that comes from us is our home, is our house. It is important to keep our sound language current and contemporary. It is important to pass on and hold our sound from generation to generation. It is our survival weapon. It is our anchor. So no matter what I sing, that is there.

***SWERV: As a legacy keeper of folk and black roots music, how important is it to you to share, educate and make relevant for the next generation the songs/music that sustained black people for centuries?***

**TR:** Collaboration is my favorite thing to do. It is very important for me to work with different artists, from different generations, and share everything. Young folks change and grow everything. It is so important to give them the space to do that.

***SWERV: You're an out black lesbian musician performing alternative music for a sitting president. How does that happen?***

**TR:** I don't know how I seem to other folks. I have a path. I am on it till I die. Obama is incredible. I beg people to look beyond the headlines and reach deep to see the work he is doing. We must also not ignore the viciousness of the attacks against him. It is an attack against us. There is a huge machine geared toward tearing him down. History has shown that [we're] a country that was started on the ideals of justice and equality for all, but it's really only for a very narrow group of the population, mainly property-owning white men. People always have a horrible time when that original idea of justice and equality for all gets widened. People lose their damn minds. That is what we are swimming in. I ask myself, is there not a disaster big enough to bring us together? The answer is no.

When I went into the White House, the only pictures of people of color I saw were the Obamas. I didn't see the whole White House, so maybe it is different in other places [of the house]. That is a friggin' problem.

My friend Ani DiFranco reminded me to be myself [for my White House performance]. I wore my Baracklyn T-shirt and rocked out with my mom and the Freedom Singers. I met Michelle Obama and the President. They are the most gracious and kind people ever. Yes, they are as beautiful in person. They were made for the job they are doing.

I was there because Obama has opened the door to the White House wide. It is significant because I think he is one of the first presidents that we have had that welcome all of the people living in America, not just folks he is comfortable with or who gave him money. It is a crazy job and you cannot satisfy the whole of the population. But I think he tries to welcome the diversity that is here.

***SWERV: In public, you've been relatively nonchalant about your sexuality and androgynous presentation since your 1990 debut. Where does that ease and self-love come from and how can others get a little of that in their own lives?***

**TR:** (Laughs) Androgynous. My people raised me right. I grew up with all kinds of people around. Don't pick on your kids about how they look. Tell them they are beautiful, ask them what they think, listen more than you talk. I am so loved. I feel right in my skin, I feel right on time. I try to keep it simple. I understand how wealthy I am on this planet. I feel lucky to not be under the stress and oppression that other people in the world are under. To wake up in the morning and worry about water is terrible. I will not waste the good position that I am in. I am in the great company of a powerful and committed community that challenges and focuses me.

***SWERV: You've been partnered for ages and raising a daughter in a same-sex family for years. Yet historically marriage hasn't always been kind to women. As a womanist in a long-term same-sex partnership, how do you feel about marriage equality for women?***

**TR:** My mom was married to my dad, and when they got divorced the judge ordered my dad to pay $25 a month for child support. There were two kids. My mom's lawyer said that's not enough, so he raised it to $40. I mean come on, the judge is protecting him over two kids. My pops (R.I. P. daddy) never paid it.

Marriage is not in my near future. We are committed to each other for life no matter what, but [there will be] no trip to some other state for a "legal" marriage. I support my friends who want to get married. I asked Bob if she would let me share her thoughts on marriage. Here you go:

**J. Bob Alotta** (filmmaker/activist/cultural instigator): In all my years as a thinking, conscious, politically savvy, queer, colored person, I have never before let the Right, or the government in general, set my

*continued on page 28*

# WRITING FOR A BETTER WORLD

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker
Photo/Marty Umans

*You will find her in classrooms, libraries and children's bookshelves around the world. Her ideas, sense of hope and voice for those young people who at times may feel like they don't have one of their own—they're all in the pages of her award-winning books. Jacqueline Woodson is one of the most heralded writers of literature for young readers of our time. She also happens to be an out lesbian of African descent. The list of accolades for her work stretches long, and includes the Caldecott Honor for* Coming on Home Soon*; a Coretta Scott King Honor and National Book Award finalist for* Locomotion *and Coretta Scott King Award for* Miracle's Boys*; a Newbery Honor Medal for* Feathers *and* Show Way*; and the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults award for her works* Hush, Miracle's Boys *and* If You Come Softly. *(A complete list is available at www.jacquelinewoodson.com.) Woodson's books for young people help encourage them to re-imagine and understand themselves and the world they live in—the one they inherit and can make better. Woodson took a moment to speak with me about her work.*

***SWERV: The idea of community is a theme in many of your books. Why is that so important to you?***

**Jacqueline Woodson:** I think community is important to many people of color in that we are often raised in them, more so than in nuclear families. I believe strongly in community and think they help broaden our thinking and allow us to see a bigger world, so naturally this would come across in my writing.

***SWERV: How did your experiences as a teenager inform and influence your current work?***

**JW:** A lot of who I was seems to go into the creation of my characters. Although I grew up in a Southern, religious family, I was allowed some leeway and exposed to lots of ways of thinking and being. Our community was diverse in so many ways—economically, ethnically, you name it—that person either lived on our block or visited it during the summer. So I was constantly seeing and watching and, as a result, my characters are watchers and thinkers...and ultimately doers.

***SWERV: Have you ever been afraid that your books would be deemed too controversial for discussing things like teen pregnancy, relationships or sexuality?***

**JW:** My books get "challenged" and censored left and right and sideways but it doesn't stop me. I'm not writing for the people who want to silence me, I'm writing for myself and for those who need to hear the voices of my characters (and, by extension, their own voice) in the world.

***SWERV: The stories you write often challenge their characters and typically their young readers to push beyond boundaries of race, gender and class. If you were asked to write a book targeted at gay adults, what themes do you think you would explore?***

**JW:** The same themes I explore in all of my books. My books are for queer people and straight people. As a community, we're all struggling with the same thing—that need for tolerance, understanding and hope. I don't ever want a gay teen to not see some part of themselves in my books. But I also want all teens to see themselves. So I wouldn't do anything different.

***SWERV: When you were a young girl, did you ever imagine that you'd be writing books for young people as an adult?***

**JW:** I knew I'd be writing but not like this. I had no idea I'd have this body of work in the world and be able to write about things that really, really matter to me. It's kind of amazing.

***SWERV: What would you say has been the highlight of your career thus far?***

**JW:** I think there are many. I think being able to write and have a family and watch my children grow up to read my books (even though my daughter, at 8, said yesterday, "I have to say, I'm not a fan of your work, Mommy"). But it's big to be able to be in the world this way. I love that I've gotten a lot of medal and plaques and stickers for my books. I love walking into classrooms and the kids having read the stuff that started in my head. I don't know... the list goes on and on. I've written nearly thirty books now and each time, it's different, and a sometimes amazingly wonderful experience.

***SWERV: What do you find most enjoyable about writing?***

**JW:** I love being able to think deeply about the lives of other people, to have the space to sit with an idea and slowly shape that idea into a world. I love when I've figured out what the story is trying to say and when the characters begin to come alive because of this. And I love when I finish a book.

***SWERV: Presumably, you explore real life complexities of identity in your books aimed at young people because you have the confidence that they can consume them, analyze them and move in their own directions in their search for self and how they see themselves in the world around them. Do you think our society offers them enough of these opportunities?***

**JW:** That's a really good question, and I don't know if I can answer it well. I think it's ultimately up to the family/ community to give the child a bigger vision of a greater good. But too often, adults don't want to see too much of the world and definitely don't want their children to see it. So if adults want to wear blinders, then their children are going to grow up with limited vision. But if people are open, then their children will be.

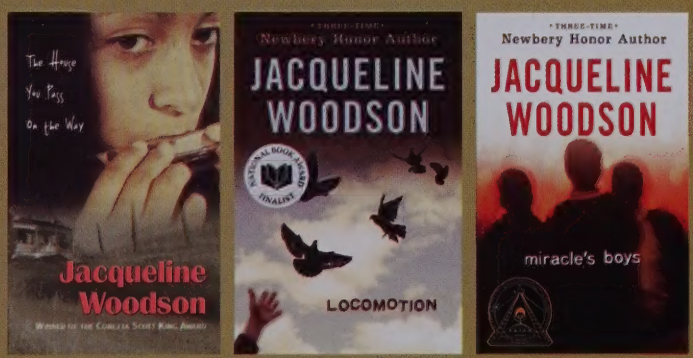
***SWERV: What are your favorite books?***

**JW:** I have so many I don't even know where to begin. The ones I come back to always, though, are *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Another Country* by James Baldwin; *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde; the poems of Cornelius Eady and Nick Flynn; the stories of Raymond Carver; *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor; *American Negro Poetry: An Anthology*, edited by Arna Bontemps; *The Miseducation of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson; *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia Maclachlan... the list really does go on and on...

***SWERV: What can we expect to see from you next?***

**JW:** *Pecan Pie Baby* is coming out in October of this year. It's a picture book. My play *Locomotion* is opening at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. on October 23, 2010. Another picture book, *Each Kindness*, will be out in 2011, as will a young adult novel that I need to get back to after this interview!

*Learn more about Jacqueline Woodson and her books at www.jacquelinewoodson.com.*




*Just a taste of the 30 books penned by Jacqueline Woodson:* The House You Pass on the Way, Locomotion *and* Miracle's Boys.

# PICTURE THIS:

## The Photography of Zanele Muholi

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker

*Miss Lesbian I.*
*Amsterdam, 2009*
*Self-portrait.*

As a child growing up in South Africa, Zanele Muholi says that she was fascinated by the idea of taking pictures and memorializing moments and images in time. In her Zulu community it was primarily the role of men to be behind the lens, with the power to choose what and how images would be captured for the record. Women were typically framed through the eyes and gaze of men as the men saw them, and not necessarily how they saw themselves. Muholi began taking pictures at family gatherings and other informal events as a way to explore the power of the lens and to claim that power for herself.

Born in Umlazi township in Durban in 1972, she matured in an age in which her country underwent rapid transformation and political transition during and after apartheid.

*Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta, Ext. 2, Lakeside, Johannesburg 2007*

As an adult she worked many years in Johannesburg as a human rights activist. Muholi's participation in the Market Photo Workshop in 2001, however, opened her up to a type of visual activism: She could combine and fully assert her passion, artistry, activism and desire to be an archivist of truth. Muholi says, "I began to wonder in 2001 how I could turn myself and my community from being objectified to become the producers of our own histories, knowledges and subjectivities. My objective was to produce work for the very same subjects I would capture, in order for them/us/me to see our likenesses, and for the future generations to have a point of reference in our collective memories, in the archives, and beyond."

*Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta, Ext. 2, Lakeside, Johannesburg 2007*

The "them/us/me" that Muholi speaks of is black African lesbian women. Historically, stories about the lives of these women have not been told in full and, when they have, they weren't told by the subjects themselves. Muholi uses her photography to allow this to happen. She uses her camera to highlight images of diverse black African lesbians in their relationships with themselves and others in raw, real and natural ways. Her work depicts tragedy and triumph of the human spirit, manifestations of love and hate, and always what, simply, is.

One of her most exciting and much discussed contributions to the world was her research paper, *Mapping Our Histories: A visual history of black lesbians in post-Apartheid South Africa.* Muholi says she created it for two reasons: "First, because we do not yet have such a history in the form of representation; and second, because like the drawing of a road map full of roads, rivers, cities, mountain ranges and valleys, our black lesbian history is not linear, but crisscrosses and intersects with our race, gender, sexuality, class and colonial histories."

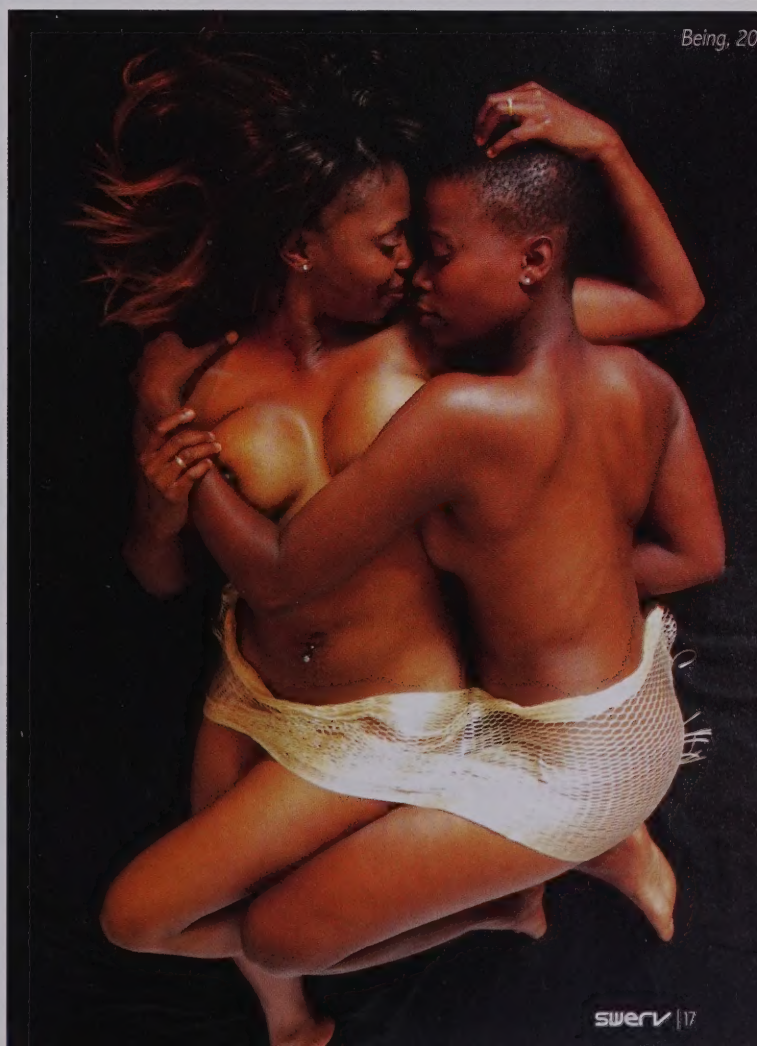
Lerato Nkutha, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 2010

Shirley Ndaba, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 20

Since completing her advanced study in photography at the Market Workshop she has gained tremendous experience and notoriety. After having her work featured in group exhibitions for several years, in spring 2004 she had her first solo exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture*. Her solo exhibition toured internationally in 2006. Another show followed in 2008 at Le Case d'Arte, Milan, and later she exhibited alongside Lucy Azubuike at the CCA, Lagos in Nigeria. She has been the recipient of the Tollman Award for the Visual Arts, the BHP Billiton/Wits University Visual Arts Fellowship, and was the 2009 Ida Ely Rubin Artist-in-Residence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 2009 she also received her master of fine arts degree in documentary media from Ryerson University in Toronto.

Muholi uses her work as a platform to make visible those who others would keep invisible, spark conversations about hate crimes and unfair treatment of lesbian women in her country, and educate and inspire others about a human experience. She continues to be an advocate for social justice—through her own work, and through Photo Experience (XP), a program she initiated to put cameras in the hands of other lesbian women so that they, too, can frame them/us/me for themselves.

Muholi is expected to have her work shown at the São Paulo Biennial this fall. For more information visit www.zanelemuholi.com.



Being, 20

# Helping lesbians and bi women get healthy

Words/Leslie Calman

*What are barriers to good health for lesbian and bisexual women? And how do we remove those barriers?*

Health and health behaviors are influenced by a multitude of factors, including public policies, the actions of community organizations, government, individual choices and environment. And for lesbian and bisexual women a social environment of prejudice and stigma continues to play a major role in determining health, by

- creating stress,
- encouraging depression and anxiety,
- allowing violence, and
- limiting economic resources—which in this country means limiting health care services.

But there are counter-influences: A strong sense of community can improve one's outlook and mental health. And there are a number of public policy and hospital policy improvements that can be made.

## Mental health

Researchers talk about a syndrome of "minority stress" experienced by members of any minority group that experience a cumulative, chronic and additive stress stemming from repeated small- and large-scale social discrimination and alienation. There is evidence of somewhat higher depression and anxiety rates among adult lesbians than heterosexuals; and much more severe depression and anxiety rates among lesbian and bisexual teens than among heterosexual teens.

Research shows that when people perceive that they lack the support of family, friends and coworkers, they are more likely to experience mental health difficulties. Indeed, rejection by one's family is strongly associated with mental illness in LGBT individuals. Where there's community and family support, these are important protections.

We also know that when women are "out" they are more likely to have positive self-esteem, and better mental health—but we don't know which of these causes the other. Are lesbians happier when they're out? Or out when they're happier?

## Another health issue is violence

Lesbian women experience more violence from strangers than their heterosexual peers, with the highest rates experienced by butch women. Lesbians also report more physical assaults in childhood than heterosexual women do—many studies suggest that victimization against sexual minorities is common in our schools. Violence is particularly prevalent among male to female transgender people, and particularly transwomen of color.

Lesbians also experience partner violence, but at lower reported rates than heterosexual women. Still, the real rates may be higher; embarrassment and unwillingness to deal with the authorities when reporting lesbian partner violence may well account for limited reporting.

## How do we deal with these problems?

Possibly in response, there are a number of self-destructive behaviors within the community. These behaviors are often ascribed simply to stress. It may be more complicated, though; some of these behaviors are condoned and encouraged by the community as a rejection of "straight norms." And that's unfortunate, because it's unhealthy.

One of these behaviors is smoking. Smoking, of course, is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, causing lung cancer and increasing the risk of heart disease and many other cancers. Some studies report two lesbian/bisexual women smokers for every heterosexual female smoker.

Another destructive behavior is alcohol abuse: Lesbian and bi women use alcohol more frequently, in higher amounts, and experience higher alcohol-related morbidity than heterosexual women. Studies show that twice as many lesbians are "heavy drinkers"—that is, 60 or more drinks per month—than heterosexual women. Our social life may play a role in this.

And then there's obesity, which is more prevalent among LBT women than among heterosexual women, with negative implications for heart disease and cancer. Some researchers have hypothesized that LBT women tend toward overweight because they do not strive to meet cultural expectations of body size. Lesbian consistently report higher ideal weights than heterosexual women, as well as less preoccupation with weight, lower drives for thinness, and higher attractiveness ratings for heavier (though not necessarily overweight) women.

The relative sense of ease around weight has its positive mental health points—but it also has negative implications for cancers, heart disease and diabetes.

## Access and avoidance

Finally, perhaps the largest issue in lesbian health is we have poor health outcomes because of not seeing physicians regularly and getting screened or treated.

Why is this? We are underinsured. Marriage is a strong predictor of health insurance, and women are far more likely than men to be covered under another person's (usually a husband's) policy. (The new federal policies broadening insurance coverage is good news for our community. Legal marriage for same-sex partners would also be a big help.)

And perhaps most important is this: We have had negative health-care experiences, ranging from non-inclusion to outright hostility. These past negative experiences make us reluctant to seek care; lesbians delay health-seeking behaviors until they are symptomatic or until symptoms are at their worst. And of course, that delay—the failure to have mammograms and Pap tests, the failure to have diabetes or high blood pressure diagnosed—can be fatal.

## Some positive solutions

Mautner Project, a 20-year old organization dedicated to improving the health of lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people, attacks these problems in several ways.

- We train doctors and other health care professionals. Our "Removing the Barriers" training teaches providers how to create welcoming environments, how to be sensitive and aware, and what particular health issues exist in the lesbian/bi community. We make this training available to health care providers around the country.
- We do outreach in the community to inform us of the need to get regular screenings for cancer, heart disease and diabetes, and to help women to access those screenings.
- And we provide hands-on assistance to help lesbians/bisexual women to quit smoking, and to attain a healthier weight

Improving our awareness and helping our sisters to get the care they need are tasks everyone in the community can participate in. Buddy up: Take a friend to her mammogram, remind her about that annual exam, go with her to the doctor's office if she needs. Our community—taking care of each other—is our greatest strength.

*Leslie Calman, Ph.D. is the executive director of the Mautner Project in Washington, D.C.*

# Equality: Think local this election season

Words/Rev. Darlene Nipper

My experience of friends and colleagues who are black and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) is that most of us are law abiding, often church-going, hardworking people living in local communities as neighbors, friends, family members and colleagues. We are everywhere, from urban centers to suburban and rural areas. We face all of the challenges and opportunities that others face, and our experience simply being visible in this world is often met with vitriolic rhetoric, hatred and violence. I was sadly reminded of this when a colleague sent a statistic to me from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs' 2009 "LGBTQ Hate Violence Report," released last month, which found that 50 percent of all anti-LGBTQ bias murder victims in 2009 were people of color. Given the connections between and across communities, and the reality of our lives stretching across multiple identities, we have a unique opportunity this election cycle to act boldly from any corner of our lives and potentially affect all of our lives.

As I've heard talk about the midterm elections over these last few weeks and months, I've thought we've focused too heavily on Congress alone. I know that this Congress was going to be our panacea, but thinking of this Congress I can't help but remember the lyrics to the Janet Jackson song, "What Have You Done for Me Lately?" You know the lyrics: "Used to be a time when you would pamper me / used to brag about it all the time / your friends seem to think that you're so peachy keen / but my friends say neglect is on your mind / who's right?" Yes, having a strong progressive leadership in Congress is critical to advancing policies that are meaningful to our communities. Yes, we have major concerns that apparently only Congress can fully address. And I think we are giving entirely too much time and attention solely to Congress, which is likely to continue to have difficulty effectively passing legislation that results in anything resembling the full equality and security that we seek.

I have friends and/or family members who have nearly lost their homes because of economic insecurity, some who are unemployed because of discrimination, some who are hardworking but fear deportation due to their immigration status, and others who are federal employees and can't put their partners on their health insurance policy because of federal legal restrictions. Newsflash: The jury is still out on the 111th United States Congress. Yes, Congress is critical and we should give them ample attention in this cycle, but Congress isn't the only place where we need strong progressive leadership.

Thinking forward to the midterms and about the policymakers needed to effectively address the concerns of the multiple communities in which I live, I am reminded that 1) I have to vote; 2) I have to implore the people around me — including those on the cushions in the meditation halls and in the pews of the churches that I frequent — to vote with me; and 3) I have to remember that elusive notion of equality that I seek — though its impact stretches to the far ends of this country's borders and beyond — really begins at home.

That's why I think our midterm election focus should be on local and state leaders as much as it is on Congress. In this midterm cycle alone 46 states—all except Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia—will hold elections for state legislatures, and 37 governors will be elected

*continued on page 27*

# Show us Your GLO

Words/Michael-Christopher

Maurice Jamal, the man who brought us such films as *Ski Trip*, *Dirty Laundry* and the series *Friends & Lovers*, is the force behind the first urban LGBT television network, GLO TV. This enormous undertaking is "the most important thing I've ever done," he says. "A course correction. A new chapter." Jamal's goal with GLO is to help create opportunities for others to tell their stories showing all of who and what we are.

Although we have a black president, we are in no way living in a post-racial society, and discrimination against sexual orientation also still exists—two things to overcome in television, an industry that clearly caters to white heterosexuals. "I have sat across from the presidents of every major network you think would be interested in this content: Logo, MTV, BET, TV1, HereTV, QTV, which is defunct now... and there's always sort of this, 'Oh that's really great—but not really what we do.' And for the gay channels I think the content has been too urban for them," Jamal says. Jamal thinks they're just not interested in telling the stories of people of color, which is evident in their lineups. He adds that even with all the people he's worked with at BET it's clear that the network is not open to featuring programming for gay America.

Despite the odds stacked against him, Jamal has pressed on. He took the advice of his pastor, who says that if you're trying to do something and don't like the results, then you need to do something different. "GLO represents that difference," he says. He also took a page from the many successful self-published authors who have "put on their good walking shoes," and he went from city to city, Pride to Pride, and talked up GLO. He also cites "denial" as a part of his process; he ignored how hard it really was going to be. Most importantly, with all the networks turning him down, he kept in mind that "just because somebody says 'no' doesn't mean that it's not a good idea," he says. "I'm not trying to get an automatic 'yes.'"

Jamal has been working in the entertainment industry since he was 13 years old, so he knows how to work a "no" into something better. A classically trained Shakespearean actor, the Oakland native started in theater, then wrote, directed and produced for the African-American Shakespeare Company and The National Black Actors' Group in the Bay Area.

Needing a new challenge, Jamal moved to New York, broke into film and television, then landed on *Chappelle's Show* as assistant director. One day, the executive producer found the script to *Ski Trip* in the office (Jamal had been sneaking in at night to make copies) and questioned Jamal about the project. After explaining he was working on his first film, she gave Jamal time off, insisting he pursue his dreams.

Years later, after selling the film to MTV, Jamal returned for a season and she told him he shouldn't come back. "She told me, 'You gotta keep doing what you do. You're on a trajectory.'" Jamal learned a valuable lesson from the experience. "We don't recognize how important our allies can be to us," he says. "[Many times] as gays and lesbians we don't give [others] an opportunity to support us because we assume the reaction is going to be negative."

After hours of hard work and "lots of caffeine," GLO will go live on September 3 and debut on the Internet with an ambitious 20 shows. Its next phases will include cable and on-demand programming. There will also be a distribution arm delivering music downloads and film on DVD. Some programming will cross all platforms, while others will only be available on cable and/or on-demand.

GLO boasts its share of star power. Some of the featured actors include Terrell Carter (*Zane's Sex Chronicles*), Rodney Chester (*Noah's Arc*), Ray Cunningham (*College Hill*), Jackée Harry (*Sister, Sister; Everybody Hates Chris*), DeMarco Majors (*Shirts & Skins*), Saaphyri (*Flava of Love*) and Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Moesha*).

Programming will include sitcoms, news, health and wellness, and docuseries. Jamal's *Friends & Lovers* will air on the network along with *Girl Power*, a reality competition program where lesbian filmmakers can have a film funded and shown on GLO. *I Am Hip-Hop* delves in the world of rap music and its precarious relationship with the gay community. On *Sex 2010* the network explores everything sexual, from the mysteries of lesbian sex to why men have sex in parks. GLO has also picked up the Internet series *Christopher Street* and *Drama Queenz*.

There is one type of show we wont see just yet on GLO. "As a kid my favorite job would be captain of the Enterprise," Jamal says. "I'd like to do a really good, interesting and compelling sci-fi show with gay characters. But it has to be done right."

Jamal's overall concern with the network is quality, staying true to the vision. He doesn't want anyone to watch just because its urban and gay. "I don't want viewership by default," he says. "I want them to watch it because it's good." And if it's good, we all shine.

For more information visit
www.glotvnetwork.com.

# Femme Men: On the Front Line?

Words/Steven G. Fullwood

Nobody messed with Tony. The first time I saw him I knew he was different. Dancer body Tony. Silly, loud Tony. Mess with him, and he would have put a hurting-on-you-for-certain Tony. Tonvy was three grades ahead of me. He was a good-looking, ropy thin brown boy who was born in tight blue basketball shorts that showed a little more than his mama would have liked. In the summer, Tony and his friends—I call them the Tonettes—would skate up and down my street, singing and dancing, laughing from the time I spotted them until the trio faded into the distance, an unofficial gay black boy parade 1974, in Toledo, Ohio.

Then there was Michael. This Clevelander came to Toledo to attend college. I sat behind him in English class. One day he caught me staring at him, and introduced himself and we became friends. Michael was a 2nd degree black belt and wore black nail polish on his toes. "Sweet" is what my father would have called him. Michael beat up a boy one day at school who called him a fag. Sweet put his black nail-polished foot in that boy's ass.

I knew why people were afraid of Tony and Michael. Here were two effeminate men—or femme men—who were themselves. Both exuded confidence. Both their demeanors announced: *I do not take mess from anyone, not you or your mama.* But allow me to back up. What exactly is a "femme" man?

I would describe a femme man as someone who identifies as or whose gender performance is decidedly female; it's a definition that is admittedly far from concrete. For example, while I exhibit effeminacies, and happily so, I do not consider myself a femme man. However, you might consider my emotional presence, optimistic life outlook and my singing like Chaka Khan as decidedly un-male.

Clearly your perspective, what you think of as truth, is solely about *you*—how you see and perceive and value your gender role. How you feel about gender roles and attitudes determines where I land—or fall and break—on a scale, subjective and riddled with complexity.

One thing that became evident as I conducted research for this article is that femme, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. While sexual identity is not an exclusive marker of effeminacy in males, the men I interviewed were same-gender-loving (SGL), gay or homo and a few identified as femme, or formerly femme. Each had overlapping ways of describing femme men and effeminacy similar to my own. A few of the men I approached for their opinions about femme men, who in fact appeared femme to me, were insulted by the inference. Why, I do not know, but I speculate that being seen as femme is… well, let's deal with our definitions first, shall we?

"A femme man is any man—gay, straight or bisexual—that is connected to his feminine side in manner, emotionally, psychologically or physically," says Tyrus, 30, who considers himself feminine yet masculine. Travis, 32, who identifies as femme, feels freedom to express himself "using whatever phrases, mannerisms or gestures" strike him. "Some of those [qualities] are definitely feminine," he adds. "Having a little sugar in your tank may be fine, but femme is when people can see the sugar before they taste it," said Clarence, 30, who also identifies as femme. "It is in my case the sashay of my swag, the untraditionally high voice, the melody in my tone and the expressiveness of my hand gestures. It is my expression of self that is contrary to the idea that men are stiff, not expressive."

"Society and our black gay culture have decided and constructed what it means to be masculine—not a man, really—and I don't fall into that construct," says Clarence thoughtfully. He paraphrases another black gay feminine man, author James Baldwin, when he says, '"I am black only so long as you think that you are white.'"

"I would define 'femme' as having an identity that revels in performing the social definitions of what is gendered feminine," says Kenyon, 35, who at one time defined himself as femme. "It could be the way you walk, talk, how you dress, gesture, the way you view the world and power." Nigel, 31, believes that "a femme man I guess would be someone who is masculine in body only, with everything else being 'feminine,' dress, posture, speech, etc."

"I embody both essences," Charly, 29, says. He considers himself both masculine and feminine. "I prefer to feel what I feel when I feel it. When I am most comfortable I display femininity; and when I have to go out into the unknown, leave my house, [possibly] meet new people, and maybe defend myself, I display masculinity."

A masculine presence is undoubtedly an asset in a sexist culture. Instinctively I knew this as a child. As a kid I was teased for being feminine. From what I gather now it was centered not solely in what I did (express myself) but how I did it (with a flair.) Perpetually pressured to "act male" by my father, relatives and any random man who saw fit to regulate my behavior, I struggled mightily to be seen as masculine, often failing at it. Instead of roughhousing, I much preferred to sing along with Diana Ross and Sylvester. Unlike Tony and Michael, I knew I had no such fierceness burning inside, or a degree in karate with which to protect myself.

"I am masculine because it is my warrior self, it is who I have to become to blend in, to deal with my exterior world," says Charly. "The masculine is my force field; it is my protection, it is my rock that I hide under, and it is what repels things and people that can hurt me."

That hurt manifested—for me, anyway—in looking on men like Michael and Tony with a mix of awe, wonder and resentment. How dare they be who they are? I chose not to. I saw their sense of freedom as too risky. This bird of a feather simply ignored that flock altogether. That feeling of disconnect stunted me emotionally, and it took some time for me to develop strong and meaningful connections with other men.

"The premium is on acting heterosexual," says Travis, who points out the complications and contradictions on how masculine and femme members of

*continued on page 27*

## BRIAN SLADE aka Ton3x *Dawn o' the Unicorn*

Sometimes when life gets you down, you wish you could be somebody else. There's no denying the high-profile and highly criticized gospel superstar Ton3x has had more than his share of stress the past year. Losing a number of loved ones, taking over his late father's ministry, and coming out and being okay with his sexuality could have been enough to drive him over the edge. Instead, all that intense activity created something else: a whole new musical expression called Brian Slade.

*Dawn o' the Unicorn* is most likely the project Ton3x dreamed about for years (or had hidden for years). Although most of his prior work has pushed the limits of contemporary gospel, it still had that smiley, hopeful, "God gon' make it all right" feel to it. *Unicorn* has allowed him to musically express anger, love, hope and yes, his hair, in ways he's never been able to before. Beginning with the highly dramatic "Unicorn," Brian Slade leads us through his intended theme: Creative types, such as vocalists, dancers, makeup artists, stylists and hairdressers are beautiful, unique and misunderstood creatures. And apparently extremely *fierce*.

"Secret Admirer" is an incredibly intense visitation to '80s new wave/electro-funk with a sprinkle of hip-hop swag. In the track Slade taunts his haters with "Nothin' lookin' like me / nothin' soundin' like me / no one dressin' like me." This is true. Musically, even Prince would be green with envy. While Prince has resorted to imitating his past self (and not doing a very good job of it) with a Jehovah's Witness sensibility, Slade has taken what the Purple One started 30 years ago and did what Prince hasn't been able to do since: Make it current. Now the look: Presumably, Ton3x borrowed the name "Brian Slade" from *Velvet Goldmine*, a 1998 British/American film based on David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust" glam rock character. In the film, Slade is also gay. On the promo material, Ton3x's Slade dons a black leather jacket accessorized with rings, bracelets and other assorted bling, with a Joan Jett hairdo. *Fierce.*

Most notable about "Secret Admirer" is the parallel to another mega-gospel artist, now an ex-gay, who's been very vocal regarding Ton3x coming out. To him, Slade sings, "I already know you're my secret admirer / privately you want to be me, yeah / I already know you're my secret admirer / publicly you want to hate me, yeah." But the best part is when Slade dares, "try this on for size," then busts a crazy, high octave vocal run. Fierce, yet again.

Other *Unicorn* highlights include the dance track "Justify My Love," which further solidifies Slade's independence, originality and fabulosity. "Glamour," mainly a funkified rap song starring Ton3x's rap persona, T. Bizzy, features three-part falsetto harmonies that would make Barry and Robin Gibb envious. The 10-minute jam "Get Over You" fuses the patented Sound of Philadelphia with modern-day ballroom flair, cat calls and all.

Although this project could be seen as Ton3x's coming out party, it falls short of being a same-gender-loving outing. *Unicorn* could have been the first CD by a major out recording artist to include an SGL love song. "Sunset," the CD's ethereal closing slow jam, comes close. In it, Slade and his boo are driving along Pacific Coast Highway, love in full bloom catching the last orange rays of the day. He goes back and forth from speaking to the listener to his significant other, so when he sings the line, "and he's wearing your favorite cologne," we're not entirely sure how that fits into his sexy ride.

Still, *Unicorn* is a top-notch project no matter what the orientation.—*MC*

*Preview it at www.myspace.com/brianslade.*

## KAOZ *The Tyler Durden EP / The Tyler Durden Mixtape*

If you like classic hip-hop, you'll be all over *The Tyler Durden EP/Mixtape*, the new releases by spoken word artist—but "rapper first"—Kaoz. By day, Kevin "Kaoz" Moore manages Minneapolis HIV education programs; his rap is very much an extension of that. Just as he gives youth the life skills they need to survive, his music also feeds souls and minds, a task he's more than willing to take on.

Kaoz has an obvious love for hip-hop, but first and foremost he loves his community. As Kevin Moore, he created Silence Equals Suicide, a showcase of spoken word artists performing original HIV/AIDS-themed works. He also received the National AIDS Education Services for Minorities (NAESM) Award of Excellence in Youth Leadership in 2007.

*The Tyler Durden EP* gets its name from the Brad Pitt character in the film *Fight Club*. The film's "Tyler" went way against the grain and wasn't afraid to stand up for what he believed in—no matter how intense, absurd or disturbing. Kaoz is just as fearless in his music and his role as out hip-hop artist.

*Tyler Durden* is an extremely listenable CD which will please true hip-hop fans. The mellow acoustic beats are as cleverly crafted as the lyrics; they're a sharp contrast from the raucous, grimy beats we hear in today's mainstream rap. Kaoz spits like a pro—and he is. He has a knack for telling stories with his rhymes, painting vivid pictures and exploring new ideas. At first listen, rap historians might think they're listening to the legendary CL Smooth, but after a few covert lines like "assign a point guard / drive it to the basket / but you dribble like warm fudge / I'm about to pack it," one might think again.

The EP opens with "Thieves in the Temple," a track describing what happens when people who think it's their job to service anything that moves wake up to find they have nothing. "White Girl" appears to be a tale reliving the ups and downs of interracial love. Digging deeper into lines like "I inhaled her seed" and "I sold her to others only to steal her back," we find Kaoz disclosing a dark period from seven years ago. After becoming unemployed, a not-so-enlightened young Kevin Moore chose to sell cocaine. For six months he was hooked on his own product; it took almost two years to get clean. He admits that, like any addiction, it's a daily battle. He calls the song his anti-drug song, "straight from the horse."

Kaoz also waxes poetic, throwing some spoken word in the mix. "The Boy Next Door" tells the tale of two teenage boys weaving in and out of the complexities of being same-gender loving in the urban Midwest. One endures homophobic abuse while his closeted friend increases the distance, realizing too late that a splash of courage and true friendship may have prevented his friend's suicide. The moving piece serves as Kaoz's tribute/apology to the gay kids that caught hell in high school while his own perceived masculinity kept him under the radar.

Kaoz can get deep but he's also got a sense of humor, which can be heard on "I Loved Loosey," a warning to bottomless bottoms: "Feels like I dived into the deep end of a pool / life jacket no where to be found / and no help." On "AntiOut," which is on the EP's companion mixtape, Kaoz pokes fun at rappers on the down low.

Whether he's community activist or MC, make no mistake, Kevin "Kaoz" Moore knows what he's doing and more importantly what he's here to do: Make a difference and make great music.—*MC*

*Preview it at www.kaozonline.com and www.reverbnation.com/kevinkaozmoore.*

# MAKE IT REIGN

Words/Dede Newby
Photo/Exclusively by Thai

When compared to most female hip-hop artists today, Ace Reign does not fit the typical image. With her long, black dreadlocks, white T-shirt, baggy jeans and white Nike Air Forces, it seems sex is not what she is interested in selling. Ace feels strongly that her musical talent speaks for itself. Her fans and admirers agree, and Ace's first release, *When It Reigns It Pours, Volume 1*, is already attracting notice from music industry professionals.

Ace, born April Winston in Washington, D.C., has been writing poetry as long as she can remember. "I used to write a lot of love poems," she says, "but after listening to such artists as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte and Trina, I decided to try rapping my poems." After studying Queen Latifah's hit, "U.N.I.T.Y.," and the vocals of MC Lyte, Ace stepped up her game and created her first song at age 12, titled "Raw." Ace's face lights up as she talks about the birth of her first original piece. "I still remember all the words," she says with a smile.

*When It Reigns It Pours, Volume 1* provides a little of everything for listeners—from R&B to rock, a touch of classical and a splash of house, polished by traditional hip-hop throughout. The best way to describe her blend of music is "an old school sound with a new school swagger," Ace says. "I think my music will appeal to the masses. There is something in it for everyone."

As a lyricist, she is not afraid to tackle sensitive topics in her music. For instance, "Beyond the Surface" addresses the judgmental views of people in society. "We all are made in God's image," Ace says, "but we are so judgmental toward each other, [to the point of] sometimes not really seeing the real blessings that are right in front of us." Yet, according to Ace, her music is something "you can bounce and pop bottles to or just relax."

Eighteen-year-old Kne'Elle Scott agrees with Ace's sentiments. She recently had the privilege of seeing Ace perform at Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center at South Carolina Black Pride's 2010 Community Expo. "I really like her music," Scott says. "When I first heard it, it caught my attention—the beats and her lyrics. If she comes out with another CD, I would buy it." Sheila Clifton from Rockhill, S.C. adds, "Her music is a new way to say it's time for something new. Her music is different, but understandable."

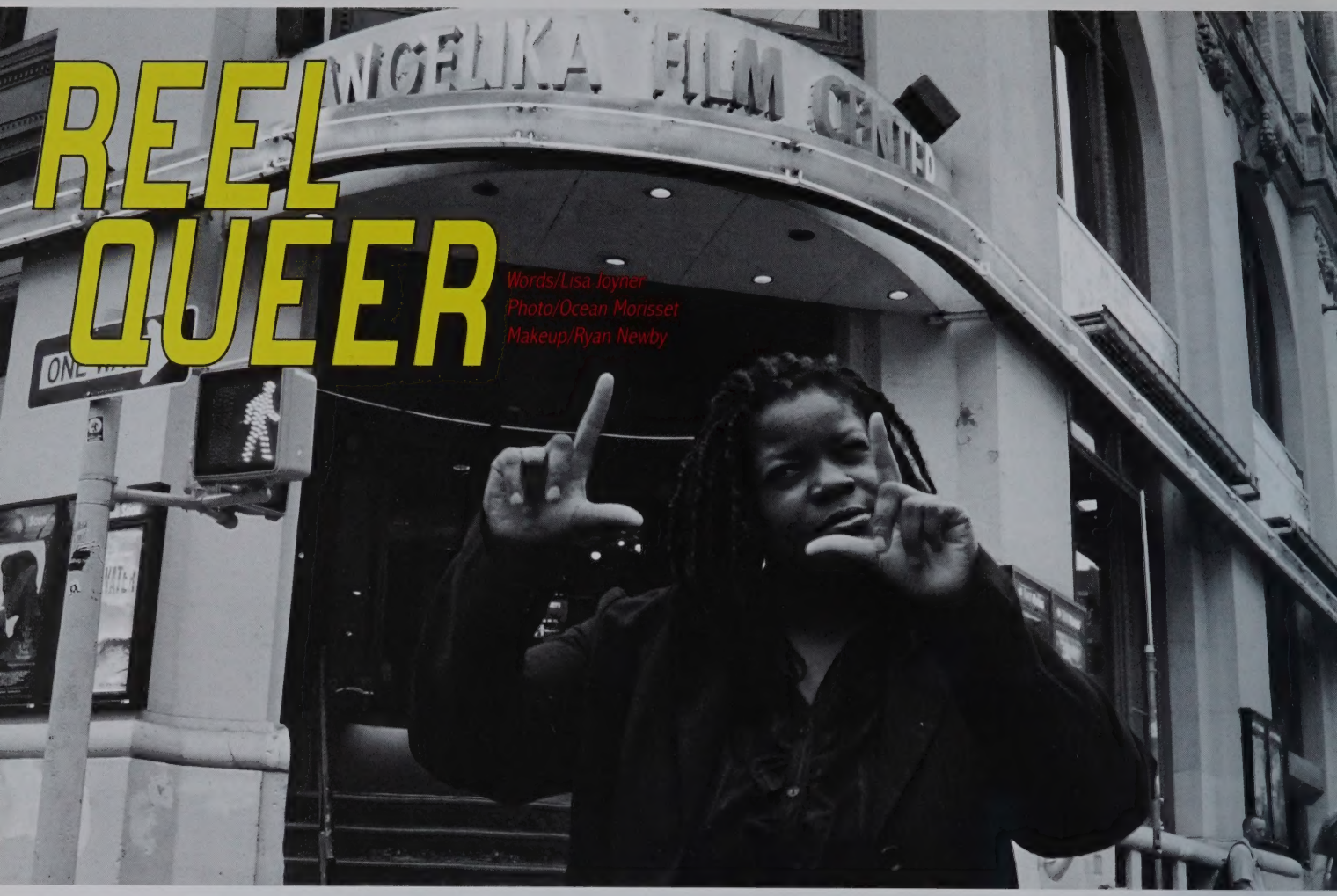
Copywrite, a well-respected underground hip-hop artist, recently praised Ace's craft. "For a female artist, Ace Reign is a great lyricist. When I first heard her, I was blown away." Rob Stern, a world-renowned producer and audio engineer, agrees: "Her voice is golden and she writes amazing lyrics," he says. Ace, Stern and electronic dance music producer Josh Gabriel co-produced "Candy Coated Whip" for the mixtape. Ace has also recently recorded "This Love" for House DJ Sander Kleinenberg's CD *5K*, to be released on Little Mountain Records on Sept. 13, 2010.

Kameelah Vose, CEO of Kamby Management Group, which represents Ace, says that she expects to see some great things from Ace. According to Vose, Ace "is genuine and does music for the love and not the financial award. She is a genius, [and] talented and gifted as a lyricist. She possesses a distinctive voice. Her music will appeal to both young and older hip hop fans."

*For more information about Ace Reign, visit sonicbids.com/acereign or facebook.com/pages/ace-reign/127485353937129. To purchase her CD, e-mail acereign@gmail.com.*

# REEL QUEER

Words/Lisa Joyner
Photo/Ocean Morisset
Makeup/Ryan Newby




*On a small red stool in the back of Lucky's, a burger joint not far from Greenwich Village, New York's infamous gay neighborhood, I awaited the arrival of Angel Brown-Ross, creator of the Queer Black Cinema (QBC) International Film Festival that takes place each year in Harlem. Brown-Ross, born and raised in Queens, N.Y., currently lives in Brooklyn. A filmmaker and film editor, she taught music and video production for seven years, and is a member of New York Women in Film & Television. After thirty minutes in walks a thick, brown woman. She aims a guilty smile in my direction, apologizes and begins to run off train logistics that in my lifetime I will never understand. I suggest that she get herself settled, order some food, and begin. She does and we do.*

***SWERV: Did you get your film editing background from college?***

**Angel Brown-Ross:** I went to school for music. I was on that route of being, you know, this music professor. I went to Tanzania, East Africa, and prior to leaving my mom gave me a camera. She said, "I never gave you anything. I always gave to other kids more than you, so, here you go." I took it with me on the trip, started filming everything, and got hit with the bug.

I took some workshops at the Harlem Screenwriters Workshop. Then I studied under Michelle Materre and Sam Pollard, who taught [workshops] at Third World Newsreel. So, I didn't go the traditional route of becoming a filmmaker. I am, for the most part, self-taught. I worked my way up sets, from being a production assistant to [being] assistant director (AD). Then I wrote my first short, *Desperate for Love*.

I always liked films; I always went to film festivals. I saw there was a lack of black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) representation here in New York; I created a monthly series. Eventually that monthly series turned into an annual film festival.

***SWERV: That's how the QBC International Film Festival came about?***

**ABR:** Umm hmm. I kinda sorta ran out of films. I was like, "OK, what am I going to do with some of this footage?" It's a monthly series. It's kind of hard finding films; very challenging, but it's not impossible. So I said, "If I start a film festival, the films that I collect for the film festival I can use for the monthly film series throughout the year." ...I also did college tours, especially women's events. We have a show called Faces of Black Women where we honor pioneer black lesbian filmmakers. The idea was to show some lesbian films but to also show emerging lesbian films, bring the pioneer filmmaker in, have a Q&A, and show them our appreciation. Last year we began giving out an award.

***SWERV: Is this done during the film festival?***

**ABR:** This is a separate event that happens in March during Women's Month. It did not happen this year. This is the first time in four years that it did not happen, due to budget cuts.

QBC International Film Festival is

not my livelihood. That's something that I do on the side, though it takes up a lot of my time. My livelihood is editing, shooting, directing, producing, and graphic designing. If I don't do that, I don't bring any money in to pay my bills and live. [But QBC] is my passion.

***SWERV: Do you find there to be such a shortage of films that you feel it necessary to accept every film submitted to the festival?***
**ABR:** Oh, my God. Thank you so much for asking this question. Absolutely not! I am a curator. There is a difference, and this is no disrespect to non-film festivals, i.e. Prides or anything like that. The whole process is different. I have submission forms. I'm looking for quality stuff.

In order for me to play with the big boys/girls, you have to come up with some quality stuff. You can't say, "Why aren't you showing more people of color films?" You can't say, "Here are some films," and then the films are crappy, the sound is not good, and the quality of production is not good. You can't say that to a Sundance. You can't say that to Outfest, Urban Festival, ABFF [American Black Film Festival]. Regardless if it's gay or straight, you can't say that when you talk of quality of substance. So with this festival, I am trying to get people to step it up.

***SWERV: I saw that last year you showed Tina Mabry's* Mississippi Damned, *and Faith Trimmel's* Family. *I actually interviewed them both. Do you know which films will show at the festival this year?***
**ABR:** Well, we just finished our call for submissions and we are going through films [now]. We are still looking for more films. We have a section in festival called First Works. The First Works don't necessarily have to be as good as *Mississippi Damned*. You've seen that film?

***SWERV: Yes. Excellent movie!***
**ABR:** The film doesn't have to be 100% excellent. It's [got to be] that promising filmmaker who makes you say, "Wow, this is one to look at." It is someone who is really going to make a mark on the industry though they are not there yet.

***SWERV: What are the clues?***
**ABR:** It's kind of what Michael Jackson said, "You just have to feel it." For example, one of the filmmakers who submitted their film, I saw their process. They actually did a short and chose to do it all over again. That says a lot—for you to complete a short already, and then to start all over and do it again? That shows me that you are very passionate, want to get this right and be taken seriously. You are serious about your craft.

***SWERV: Does it mean that they're good, though?***
**ABR:** No, but for the most part [the film] is good. It's not a *Mississippi Damned* or a *Brooklyn's Bridge to Jordan*...but it's up there.

***SWERV: Is the QBC International Film Festival still connected to a music festival? I previously saw it listed as the QBC International Film and Music Festival.***
**ABR:** The first year I did the film festival it was "and music," because remember, I have a very strong background in music. When I got a sponsor, the first time they actually gave me money for the festival, they suggested I should take the music part out and develop the festival first, then add the music later. I thought that was smart, because the way I envision the film festival was to have music concerts at this festival as well as films.

Last year I took a lot of steps backward. I used to have a monthly film series; I stopped that so that I could focus on the film festival. ...Focus on one thing, make it really good, big and nice and just add as it grows.

One thing I didn't want to change was "International." [Last year] I showed work from [filmmaker] Campbell. [You can learn more about Campbell at www.blackmanvision.com.] This year I will show *Society*, which is a South African Lesbian series that is very successful in South Africa. They combined two episodes into one so that they can travel the film festival with it. I am opening the film festival with *A Changing of Guards*, which is a film out of the Bahamas.

***SWERV: Let's talk about your film magazine.***
**ABR:** It's called *Cinematiq*. I changed the "c" to a "q," because I wanted to represent queer.

It basically gives you a distinct and unique perspective of black LGBT cinema. In this magazine you will see articles on *Mississippi Damned* or, let's say, *Precious*. The lesbian couple in *Precious*, you know, those characters were pretty much washed over. You didn't hear much about them in the mainstream media, which bothered me, because they played such a pivotal role in the process of her moving forward with her life. No one really talked about that. I'm trying to create a magazine where we can talk about this. I want to talk about *Death at a Funeral* where the father was gay. How did the family react to that? On top of these different film reviews [there are] also how-to articles.

***SWERV: Are you single, Angel?***
**ABR:** (laughter)

***SWERV: That's always my last question.***
**ABR:** I don't know if I want to answer that question...

*The QBC International Film Festival takes place Oct. 14-17, 2010 at the National Black Theatre in Harlem, N.Y. Last year more than fifteen movies (1,500 tickets sold) were shown over the course of four days.*

*To learn more, visit www.queerblackcinema.org, or www.cinematiqmag.com.*

# THE WAY I SEE IT

Words/Rob Smith

The scene played out in slow motion. As I looked up at the server of one of New York City's never-ending supply of expensive restaurants that seems to specialize in mediocre food, I saw his expression: a mixture of disdain and sadness, his eyebrows lifted up in slight dismay. "I'm sorry sir, but your card has been declined," he said. Mortified, I felt the chill of deep embarrassment spread up my legs and into the pit of my stomach.

I looked guiltily at the members of my sports team that had invited me out—the ones with duplexes on the Upper West Side and homes in Long Island. The ones with money. I should've known better when my restaurant suggestion of Chipotle was scoffed at. Perhaps I should've declined those two glasses from the bottle of wine that was split evenly among the table. Alas, I didn't, sure that my Capital One Visa would be there to save me. Emergency, indeed.

A few apologies and a quick trip to the ATM later, I said my good-byes as they headed to a popular bar in the midtown gayborhood, undoubtedly to rack up a bar tab that was roughly the size of my weekly grocery budget. As I walked down 8th Avenue past the succession of clothing stores I began to look at my gay brethren walking up the street in my direction. I looked intently at their Prada sunglasses, their $75 haircuts, their Universal Gear shopping bags and their Puma shoes. I wondered, not for the first time, where in the *hell* all their money was coming from. Trust funds? Great stocks? Side jobs as professional escorts? Or were they really just fabulous super-gays with amazing jobs and boatloads of disposable income?

For some reason, talking about money has become the ultimate taboo. Gays talk freely and openly about giving BJs, but watch your back if you ask about their IRA. Why is that? Have we become so inundated with the myth of the super-wealthy, fabulous gay that we feel an immense pressure to live up to it? After all, studies have shown time and time again that gay men and women earn less, on average, than their straight counterparts.

After two and a half years of living hand to mouth in one of the most expensive cities in the world, it was enough to make me feel despondent. I'm an H&M boy in a D&G world, and chasing dreams of writing, speaking and making a difference doesn't buy a full-floor penthouse duplex on 16th Street. I began to wonder about the motivation for life, the motivation to work, and some of the joy we sacrifice in order to have "nice things." The point had been made a few months earlier during a conversation over (a $30) brunch with a friend of a friend. "Look," he said, deep brown eyes fixed intensely on mine, "I like having nice stuff. I like going to brunch. I like having a cute apartment. So what if I hate my job? At least I'm making money."

But is making money really what it's all about? Is the be-all and end-all of gay culture simply to strive toward the upper middle-class comforts that allow us to be as fashionable as the characters on *Noah's Arc*, have a penthouse apartment like Carrie Bradshaw, or to take the trips on the Atlantis cruises and Black Pride excursions advertised in the pages of magazines like *Out*, *Instinct* and, yes, *SWERV*? I'm not so sure anymore, especially not as I prepare to leave a cushy advertising job with the potential for a six-figure income to pursue a different career simply because it makes me feel purposeful and fulfilled.

When I got the idea for this column, I was afraid to write it. I was afraid to break the middle-class illusion that my doorman apartment (rented), sporadically cute clothes (H&M, Gap and vintage) and nights out to dinner (courtesy of Groupon.com) had helped me create for so long. An illusion, perhaps, that was never bought by anyone as well as it was aggressively sold by me. Perhaps as gay men we're all Lords of Illusion, projecting images of money, power, wealth and style so that nobody looks close enough to realize that it's all a game.

When I look back at all that I've thought about and gone through in the past few months since the incident at the restaurant, I think maybe that was why I finally decided to forfeit. I don't really have expensive clothes, or go out to expensive dinners, but that's OK. I cook at home, get great deals on clothes, and am an absolute beast at finding a good happy hour deal in New York City. I'm also more content in my life and work than I have been in years.

Even though I'm young and broke, I feel *fabulous*.

*Rob Smith is a freelance writer located in New York City. He's written for* USA Today, The Huffington Post, *and* AfterElton.com. *He is currently working on a memoir detailing his tenure as a gay soldier in the U.S. Army. Contact him at robsmithvet@gmail.com and twitter.com/robsmithonline.*

## FEMME MEN continued from page 21

the SGL community see and characterize each other. "On the one hand many folks—even gays and femmes—see femme as weak and negative, and then we often celebrate hyper black femininity and divas," he says.

Clarence concurs. "The more masculine you are the more valued and desired you are and the more femme you are the less valuable and desirable you are—socially and romantically," he says. "In that, there is some internalized homophobia, some sheer discomfort with self, some lack of progress being made by a community of black men who could gain from each other but don't." Clarence rightfully perceives that this construct that many black men have built is sealed "with ignorance and keeps other black men out and everyone locked in a bad place."

While Tyrus feels similarly, he also is witness to what he sees as a change—if only superficially—occurring in traditional gender biases among black queer men. "Until recently, the black queer community ranked the femme man similarly to a transgendered individual, who is often at the bottom of the queer totem pole," he remarks. "Now I see a desire and lust for feminine men. I reside in Harlem and there is a new gay renaissance occurring. You notice the 'straight men' checking out the boys pumping down 125th Street and looking at them long and hard. A femme man, when partnered with a man who considers himself masculine, I think he makes them feel more dominant. A masculine man doesn't long for another masculine man; he longs for the softer, daintier individual."

While I am not sure about what Tyrus is suggesting—masculine men and their quest for femininity as a complement—what I do recognize is how powerful the male/female dynamic is and how people, through nature or nurture, reach for it. However, we are born of a physical male and a physical female, and so we possess the spiritual, emotional and sometimes physical resources of each. This powerful if confounding fact is often ignored or obscured in blaring, misleading and harmful social constructs that tell us about being alive, but more about how to act. And so while so-called opposites attract and may be a *preference* for some, it is not exclusive nor reveals our complex nature if relieved of social expectation and regulation.

Femme men are attracted to me and I to them. A few of them have become good friends, and others have become lovers. One particular femme man I dated was exceptionally in tune with what he felt, wanted and desired. I have wondered if his effeminacy—his delicate gestures, smart dressing and emotional maturity—made me feel like a "man." Man, in my case, is defined as less delicate and in utter denial of my feelings. The main impression he left me with required me to more carefully consider my own wants and desires, be forthcoming with my thoughts, and perhaps dress a bit better.

"I am open to the possibilities," says Clarence when asked if he would date other femme men. "I am a same-gender-loving man. I understand what gender is, loving is and what manhood is. None of those things are contingent on the construct of masculinity or effeminacy."

"I love femme guys because I love the femme qualities in men," says Charly. "I want to touch, protect, and kiss, sex, explore and protect them, just as I wish to have someone do to my feminine side."

Kenyon's trajectory from femme to perhaps *less* femme is not only a matter of the beholder, but also reflected in his preferences.

"I have mostly also been a top in my sexual life and have tended to attract butch bottoms. But in my older age I am less femme-identified, and I am approached, and, well, fuck/date more femme men," he said. "But mostly now the men I tend to date are more like me, more a balance of the two."

"I think I have learned, though, to really respect, admire and be attracted to both feminine and masculine energy for the different but important things they bring to the table," Travis said, adding that "I think queer men of color are quite capable of making that a quality we all share."

"I stopped trying to trap some homothug hoping he would validate me and being ashamed of putting my hands on my hips," he said.

What strikes me most in my reflection on femme men, particularly Tony and Michael, is that they were men in the best sense of the word. In my evolution of what I hope to be—open, free, beautiful—my journey has been aided and nurtured by men who were femme, or at the very least, not afraid to be feminine. Unlike a great deal of the self-proclaimed *men's* men in my life, femme men have offered me the types of experiences that Charly describes as "sensual, emotional, manicured, pretty, light, joyous, colorful, alluring," and this I love and appreciate dearly. While traditionally masculine men have their gifts, femme men point to what's possible. Their energy tends to unlock doors, not shut them. Nigel rightfully calls femme men the vanguard. "Like trannies, they can't hide or 'shift' out of form. They are our soldiers," he says. Uncelebrated warriors. Until now.

## THINK LOCAL continued from page 19

in 2010. These next state leaders will have numerous opportunities to affect our lives, including that once-in-a-decade chance — depending on which party is in control — to be a part of redrawing the Congressional districts after the 2010 census. This redistricting will impact all of us for at least the next decade, but given the history of incumbency, undoubtedly for far beyond. And these leaders will have the chance to effect change through ordinances and legislation ranging from legalization of medical marijuana to passing local non-discrimination ordinances protecting transgender community members and, in some states, laws that will approve or ban same-sex relationship recognition and/or adoption. Let's not forget Arizona law SB1070 and the many copycat laws that are pending. The acts of local and state legislative bodies have enormous implications for how we live our daily lives. From district buildings to state houses to the nation's capital, we need legislators and policymakers who understand our needs and who will act accordingly.

That's why voting this November will be one of the single most important actions each of us can take. The equality and security we seek begins at home. We aren't the only ones voting. Our family members and prayer partners, our neighbors and colleagues, our friends and our acquaintances are all voting, too. All of us need to work locally and nationally through volunteering and voting, going door to door, and phone-banking, to ensure that there is a progressive leadership in office that is not afraid to act on behalf of our communities at home, in our state houses and city halls, and on Capitol Hill.

All across this country African-American and other ethnicities of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are facing the daily challenges of caring for their families under the heavy cloak of ongoing stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression and racial identity. Let's put our collective shoulders to the wheel during this election cycle and work for a progressive leadership at the local, state and national levels that will legislate to ensure justice, and guarantee equality for us all.

*Rev. Darlene Nipper is the deputy executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and an ordained interfaith minister.*

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agenda. I can't imagine why I would start now. It is to me a movement spoon-fed to us that was picked up by some "capital G" gays with "normalcy" as its goal—again. To date [same-sex marriage] is not something that has been particularly important to me. That said, do I think we all deserve equal protection under the law? Yes. Am I insanely attached to ritual? Yes. Do I possibly believe in everlasting love? Yes. And do I love throwing a good party more than almost anything else? Yes. Plus, I like to get dressed. So don't get me wrong. I'm happy to get invited to a good wedding. I'd maybe one day get coaxed into having one. But right now, I'm interested in a movement with actual equality as its goal: access to a living wage, the preservation of public space, the decentralization of wealth, and the decriminalization of our youth. Otherwise, it would seem to me that we'd be signing on as complicit participants in a system still very much configured for our actual demise, not well-being. Also, let's face it: I'm busy and tired, and Daddy's getting a lil' old; if I'm gonna get it up to fight I have to pick my battles. The fight for marriage equality does not seem to me to be the best use of my skills/time/effort, but ya know, it takes all kinds.

***SWERV: What's your secret to maintaining such a beautiful, long-standing relationship?***

**TR:** Commitment. Bob committed to our daughter first. She told her that no matter what happened in our relationship she knew she would be a part of Tashawn's life forever. It is hard work. We have committed to the process of being together in the world. She is one of the best people I have ever met. I am in awe of her creativity and purpose. She is really good-looking, a great cook and an amazing dancer. She loves House music. She has spent the last few years being the chair of the board for Fierce (www.fiercenyc.org) in addition to all of the other work she does. I really love her; I really like her. I am willing to do what it takes to be with her. Not always easy, but always worth it.

***SWERV: As a BBW [big beautiful woman], how does all the media and cultural emphasis on size ring for you, and have you found this conversation creeping into lesbian circles?***

**TR:** I have never looked to the media as a yardstick for who I should be in the world, or what I should look like. [That's a] spirit death for black women. For the majority of the time we have been on the globe and there has been a "media," they have gotten us wrong and have never fully appreciated or celebrated our gifts and diversity. Now that there have been some wonderful publications, TV shows, etc. presented by people of color, I still find the view too narrow.

Photo/Bernie DeChant

I think the biggest concern for me [about] being big is health. I have always been big. I love my body. I also love being alive. Good health and self-love through good health is important. This does not mean I will ever be a skinny person, but that is a goal for me. Over the last few years I have lost weight every year, going down three pants sizes 'til my daughter yelled at me to buy new pants because my clothes were too big and I looked stupid. So, again, my goal is not to be skinny, but to strive for good health—because I love my life and when I die, I want it to be because I am very old. I have always felt beautiful and I do not enjoy compliments about weight loss. I know folks are obsessed over a certain kind of beauty. I saw the beautifully sculpted brother on the cover of one of your magazines. That is how it is and for me, as I said before, I feel good inside the body I have.

As for lesbians, I think the same issue affects our community. I do find more support for women of size in our community. I also think that is because there are a lot of activists in our community and a strong willingness to fight against discrimination. Now that lesbians have taken strong roles in the media, it is fun to see some little bits of diversity seeping into the mainstream, although I would like more, more, more.

***SWERV: You've worked with some pretty incredible musicians as a producer, including Chocolate Genius, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and most recently with Lizz Wright on* Fellowship*—always to high acclaim. Has it gotten any better for women producers and why do you think there are so few?***

**TR:** Why do I think there are so few? Because women can't do it? (Laughter) I am being sarcastic. Come on now, it takes a movement to change the imbalance of systems that have worked so hard to keep the field from being diverse. I think men dominate the producer end of the music business. I have inched my way in. Working with Lizz on *Fellowship* is the first time I have produced on a *major* label. It drops Sept. 28, 2010.

***SWERV: What's next for your band, Big Lovely; your label; and Toshi Reagon?***

**TR:** I am in the studio with my drummer, Robert Burke [of the group The Duke and the King]. We are producing my next studio record. I am also mixing the Big Lovely live record. I am looking forward to Lizz's release. I am doing a show with Lizz and my mom next spring at the Schomburg [Center for Research in Harlem, N.Y.] celebrating the music of Odetta. Work, work, work, all the time. Music, music, music, all the time.

Advancing an Agenda for Research, Policy, and Service in the Interest of Black Gay Men

BGRG

The Black Gay Research Group

# The Black Gay Research Group responds to the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

The Black Gay Research Group (BGRG) welcomes the release of the first National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States. We are heartened by the efforts on the part of President Barack Obama and his administration to allocate resources toward fighting the AIDS epidemic in the United States. Of particular note is the vision for the National HIV/AIDS strategy which rightly focuses on prevention of new HIV infections and ensuring access to "high quality, life-extending care, free from stigma and discrimination" for those who do become infected. As a group of researchers, advocates, and community service providers, we are pleased that the comprehensive plan recognizes the importance of sound research and community based approaches to reducing HIV infections. Most importantly, we applaud language in the plan that indicates that communities most disproportionately affected by the epidemic will have access to appropriate resources to combat it. Black men who have sex with men (MSM) communities are most disproportionately affected by the domestic epidemic, and we believe that this report augurs well for ensuring that this community is sufficiently supported in its fight against HIV.

Yet, while we are pleased with the report overall, there are some core issues remaining that we strongly believe must be addressed as the nation moves toward implementing this plan. The report rightly mentions that fighting HIV among Blacks is not mutually excusive with fighting HIV among gay and bisexual men; however, we offer caution at the report's presentation of these categories of lived experience as separate. For Black MSM, race, culture, and sexuality are inextricably intertwined and create a psychosocial experience that is unique and not an additive result of being Black and being gay or bisexual. Therefore, to reduce the HIV related health disparities in this community, there must be a focus on addressing structural factors involving racism, homophobia, and other macro and micro level impediments that permeate the lives of Black MSM in addition to specific interventions that are culturally grounded and based on rigorous scientific, culturally specific, methodological approaches. Reducing HIV infections in gay and bisexual men as well as in Black communities cannot occur without addressing the specificity of the experiences of Black MSM and creating interventions that meet their particular needs. Furthermore, the National HIV/AIDS strategy, particularly with respect to Black MSM, cannot be successfully implemented without the allocation of additional Federal funds

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy is a much-needed step in the right direction toward addressing the epidemic in the United States. We offer the following recommendations that we believe are key to successful implementation of the plan:

- Recognize that the needs of Black MSM as a group should be addressed specifically and that it should not
  be assumed that this group will be sufficiently reached through efforts targeted to the Black community or
  gay and bisexual men.
- Utilize researchers who are reflective of the communities disproportionately affected by the epidemic.
- Identify, train, and develop researchers and community leaders who are reflective of the communities disproportionately affected by the epidemic.

Provide additional funds from the Federal Government in order to implement the plan. We look forward to collaborating with all the stakeholders involved to ensure that the implementation plan for the National HIV/AIDS Strategy is successful.

*The BGRG was founded in 2001 in an effort to strengthen, empower and provide a network for Black gay researchers and community workers/activists. Its mission is to advance an agenda of research, policy and service in the interests of Black gay men. More information about the BGRG can be found at www.bgrg-international.org.*

**September 12-15, 2010**
**United States Conference on AIDS (USCA)**
**Orlando, FL**

The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) presents the largest AIDS-related gathering in the U.S., bringing together over 3,000 workers from all fronts of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
www.2010USCA.org

**September 17-19, 2010**
**2nd Annual Black Lesbians United Retreat**
**Malibu, CA**

A celebration of women of African descent who love other women. Women from throughout the U.S. and abroad come to experience this unique event.
www.blacklesbiansunited.org

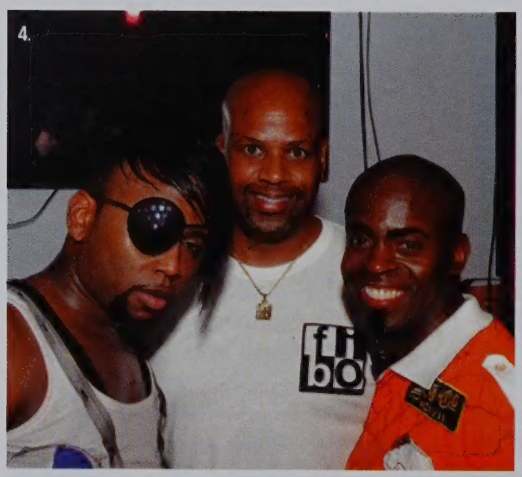
**October 6-11, 2010**
**11th Annual Black Gay & Lesbian Pride Caribbean Cruisin'**
**New Orleans, LA to Cozumel, Mexico**

Ebony Pyramid Entertainment and host Rodney Chester (Alex from *Noah's Arc*) lead this adventure from the Big Easy to a new site in Mexico.
www.ebonypyramidonline.com

**October 9, 2010**
**The Human Rights Campaign's (HRC) 14th Annual National Dinner**
**Washington, DC**

This year's honorees include producer/director Lee Daniels and Grammy Award-winning artist Pink.
www.hrcnationaldinner.org

# ON THE SCENE



**Washington, D.C.'s White Attire Affair HIV awareness fundraiser and Fire Island BlackOut beach party.**

*1. Host Rayceen Pendarvis and friend. 2. White Attire Affair guests. 3. SWERV co-publisher Jamil Fletcher with stylist Yardé Noir and friends. 4. Recording artist Ton3x, FIBO staff member James, GLO Network's Maurice Jamal. 5. FIBO guests arriving at the beach. 6. FIBO event.*

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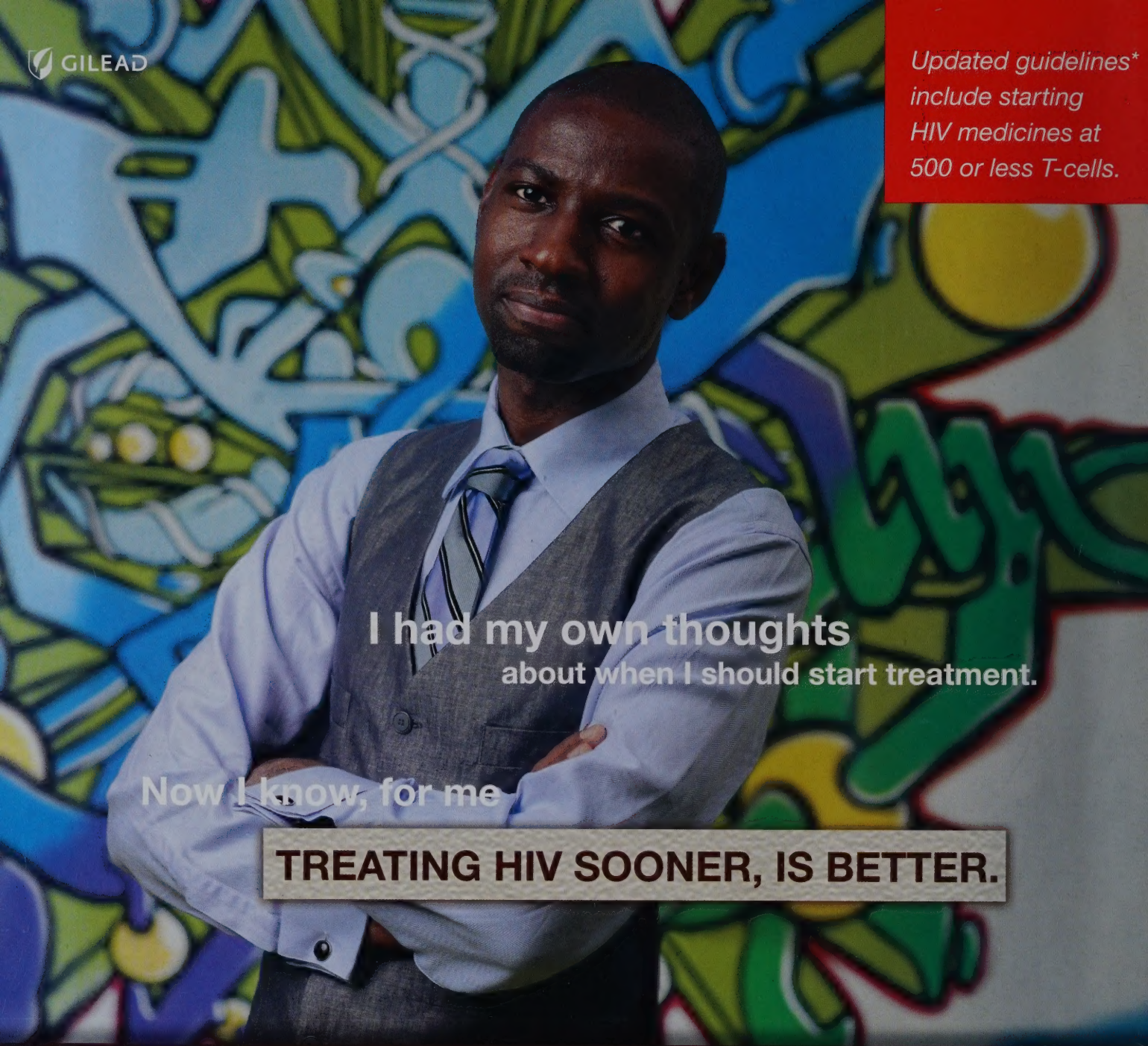
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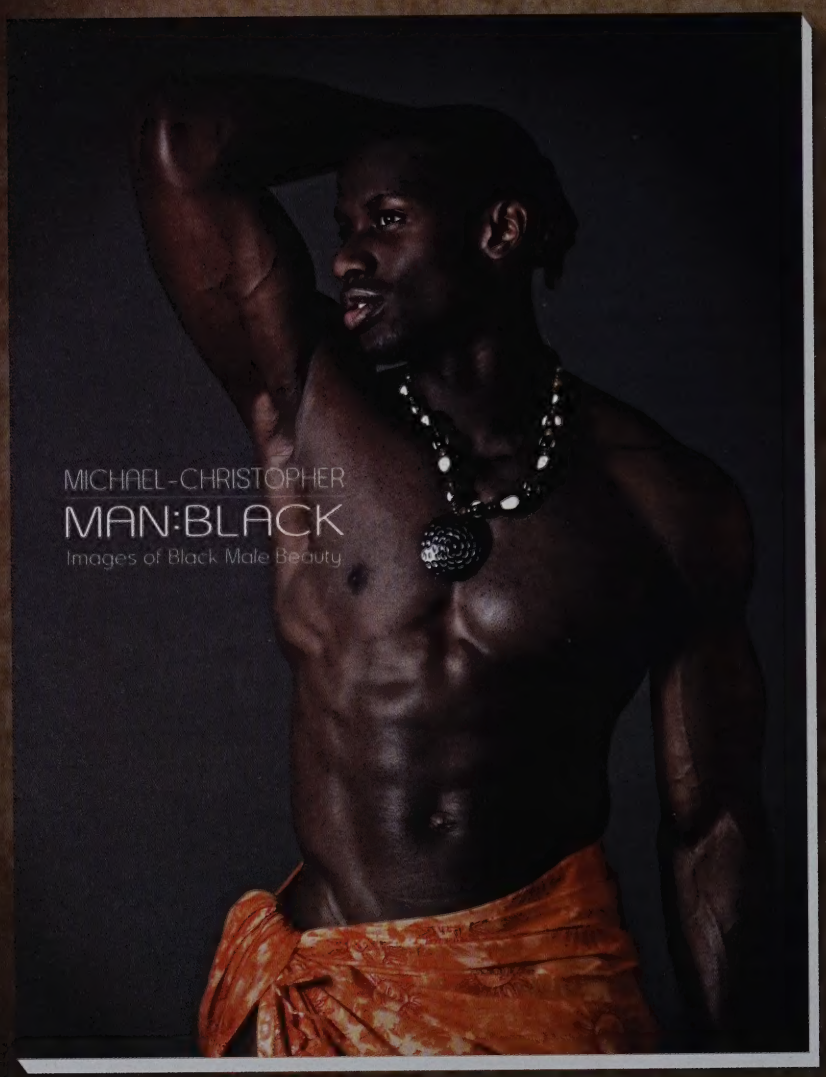


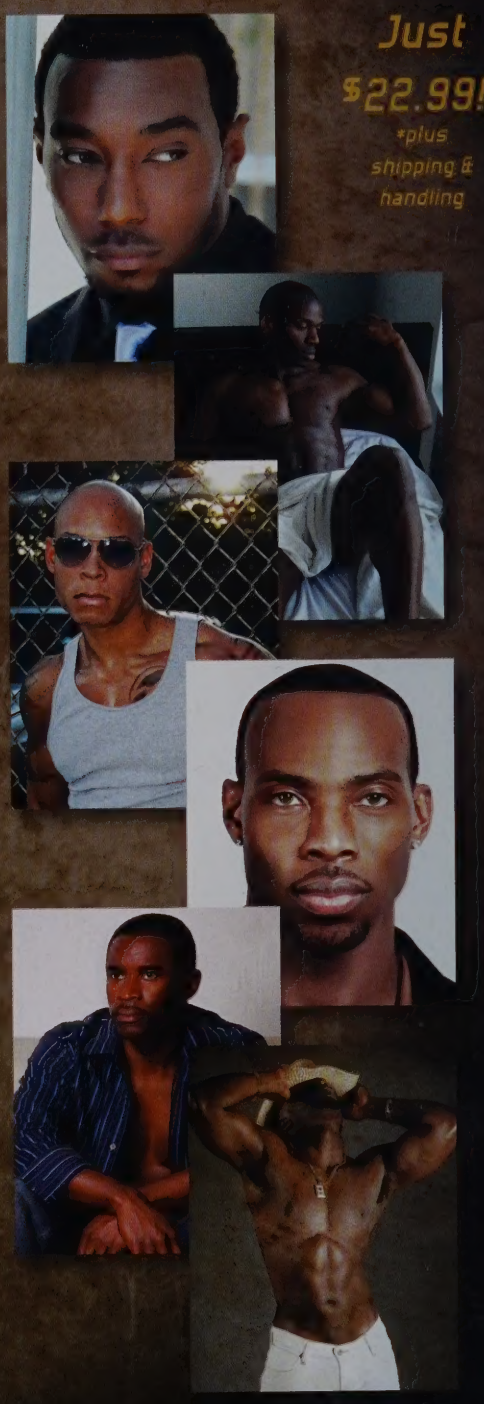

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# contributors

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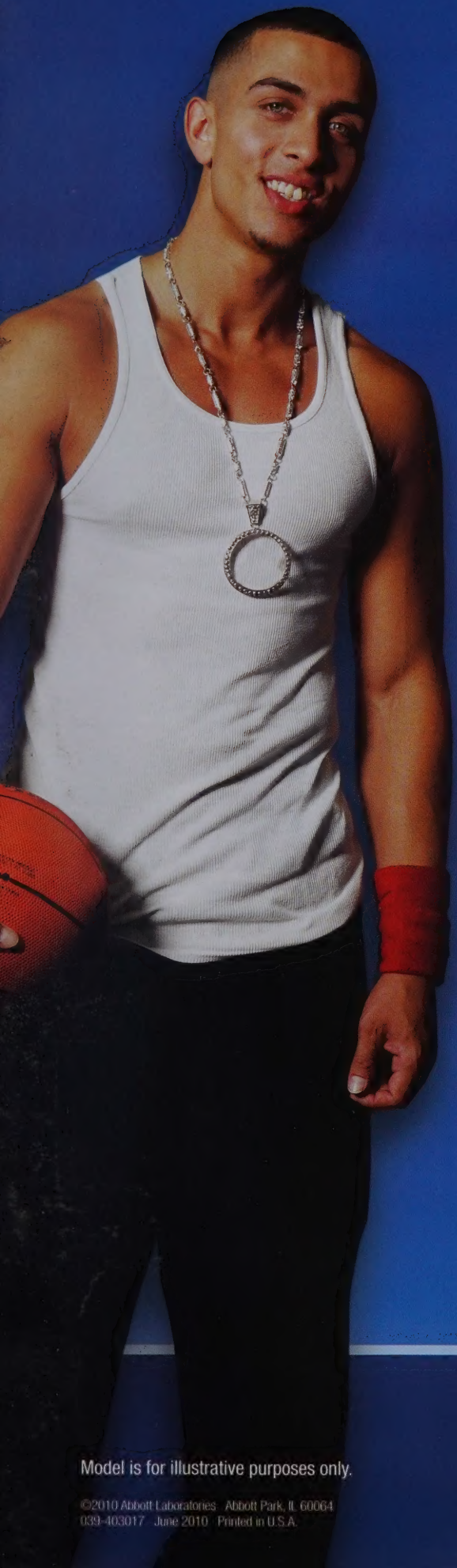
Steven G. Fullwood is a writer living in Harlem. He was the recipient of the 1972 Martin Luther King Jr. School Trophy for Writing in Cursive as a kindergartner.

L. Michael Gipson is an Oakland-based cultural critic, community health planner and award-winning youth advocate. His sociopolitical essays have been published in two anthologies, including *Poverty & Race in America: The Emerging Agendas* (Chester Hartman, ed.). As a cultural critic and music journalist, Gipson's work has appeared in *Clik*, *Pulse*, *Arise*, *Pride*, *Amplify*, *Urban Dialect*, *Port of Harlem* and *Creative Loafing ATL*. He is editor and columnist at www.SoulTracks.com and heard weekly as "Cornfed" on *The Dave Brown Radio Show*.

Lisa Joyner is a freelance writer/editor, activist and a producer on WPFW's LGBT radio show, *Inside Out*, in Washington, D.C. Her recent work includes poetry in the anthologies *Growing Up Girl: A Manifesta* and *Just Like a Girl*. She lives in Washington, D.C.

Dede Newby's artistic and creative abilities became apparent at an early age. After an English professor took a personal interest in her writing talent, Newby began to work seriously on improving her writing skills. Newby landed her first freelance assignment with *Qmocha* magazine, then got a freelance position with *Qnotes*, a biweeky paper distributed throughout North and South Carolina. Newby then accepted a position with South Carolina Black Pride as the publicity coordinator where she wrote business articles, blogs, public releases and e-mails and several pieces concerning essential news, politics, organizational and community events. To express herself more artistically, Newby writes short stories which can be found on imfromdriftwood.com.

Washington, D.C. native Yardé Noir began Genesys Productions before graduating from Duke Ellington School of the Arts in 1997. Noir went on to Bennett Career Institute majoring in hair and make-up, lending his talents as an experienced cosmetologist. Noir has worked as a make-up artist for Smashbox Cosmetics and Pretty by PR, and sits on the artistic team for Joya Cosmetics. Noir is the 2008 Elite Beauty Make-Up Competition Winner. Noir also attended the Art Institute of Washington majoring in graphic design and is currently pursuing a master educator's license.



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KALETRA once daily should not be given to children. KALETRA once daily should not be taken with efavirenz (Atripla® and Sustiva®), nevirapine (Viramune®), amprenavir (Agenerase®), nelfinavir (Viracept®), carbamazepine (Tegretol® and Epitol®), phenobarbital (Luminal®), or phenytoin (Dilantin®). There may be a greater chance of getting diarrhea with the once daily regimen compared with the twice daily regimen.

**Use**

KALETRA® is a prescription anti-HIV-1 medicine called a protease inhibitor that contains lopinavir and ritonavir. KALETRA is used with other anti-HIV-1 medicines to increase the chance of treatment response in people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-1) infection. It is not known if KALETRA is safe and effective in children under 14 days old.

KALETRA does not cure HIV-1 infection or AIDS and does not stop you from passing HIV-1 to others. You may still get opportunistic infections or other conditions that happen with HIV-1.

**KALETRA Safety Considerations**

Do not take KALETRA® if you are allergic to any of its ingredients, including lopinavir or ritonavir. Do not take KALETRA with certain medicines, as they can cause serious problems, death, or make KALETRA less effective against HIV. Some patients taking KALETRA can develop inflammation of the pancreas and liver problems, which can cause death. Patients may develop changes in heart rhythm, large increases in triglycerides and cholesterol, diabetes, high blood sugar, changes in body fat, and/or increased bleeding in people with hemophilia. Some patients may develop signs and symptoms of serious infections they already have after starting anti-HIV medicines.

You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA. Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch, or call 1-800-FDA-1088 (1-800-332-1088).

If you cannot afford your medication, contact: www.pparx.org or call the toll-free number (1-888-4PPA-NOW) or (1-888-477-2669) for assistance.

For additional information about KALETRA, call 1-866-KALETRA (1-866-525-3872) or visit KALETRA.com.

Please see Brief Summary on adjacent pages.

KALETRA®
(lopinavir/ritonavir)

Model is for illustrative purposes only.

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# KALETRA® (kuh-LEE-tra) (lopinavir/ritonavir) Tablets
# KALETRA® (kuh-LEE-tra) (lopinavir/ritonavir) Oral Solution

**CONSUMER BRIEF SUMMARY**
**CONSULT PACKAGE INSERT FOR FULL PRESCRIBING INFORMATION**

## Patient Information

Read the Medication Guide that comes with KALETRA before you start taking it and each time you get a refill. There may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking with your doctor about your medical condition or treatment. You and your doctor should talk about your treatment with KALETRA before you start taking it and at regular check-ups. You should stay under your doctor's care when taking KALETRA.

### What is the most important information I should know about KALETRA?

**KALETRA may cause serious side effects, including:**

- **Interactions with other medicines. It is important to know the medicines that should not be taken with KALETRA.** Read the section "What should I tell my doctor before taking KALETRA?"
- **Changes in your heart rhythm and the electrical activity of your heart.** These changes may be seen on an EKG (electrocardiogram) and can lead to serious heart problems. Your risk for these problems may be higher if you:
  - already have a history of abnormal heart rhythm or other types of heart disease.
  - take other medicines that can affect your heart rhythm while you take KALETRA.

Tell your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms while taking KALETRA:

- dizziness
- lightheadedness
- fainting
- sensation of abnormal heartbeats

**See the section below "What are the possible side effects of KALETRA?" for more information about serious side effects.**

### What is KALETRA?

KALETRA is a prescription anti-HIV medicine that contains two medicines: lopinavir and ritonavir. KALETRA is called a protease inhibitor that is used with other anti-HIV-1 medicines to treat people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV-1) infection. HIV-1 is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

It is not known if KALETRA is safe and effective in children under 14 days old.

### Who should not take KALETRA?

- Do not take KALETRA if you are taking certain medicines. For more information about medicines you should not take with KALETRA, please see **"Can I take other medicines with KALETRA?" and consult with your doctor about all other medicines you take.**
- Do not take KALETRA if you have an allergy to KALETRA or any of its ingredients, including ritonavir and lopinavir.

### What should I tell my doctor before taking KALETRA?

**KALETRA may not be right for you. Tell your doctor about all your medical conditions, including if you:**

- have any heart problems, including if you have a condition called Congenital Long QT Syndrome.
- have liver problems, including Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C.
- have diabetes.
- have hemophilia. People who take KALETRA may have increased bleeding.
- have low potassium in your blood.
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if KALETRA will harm your unborn baby. Birth control pills or patches may not work as well while you take KALETRA. To prevent pregnancy while taking KALETRA, women who take birth control pills or use estrogen patch for birth control should either use a different type of birth control or an extra form of birth control. Talk to your doctor about how to prevent pregnancy while taking KALETRA.
- take KALETRA during pregnancy, talk with your doctor about how you can take part in an antiretroviral pregnancy registry. The purpose of the pregnancy registry is to follow the health of you and your baby.
- are breast-feeding. Do not breast-feed if you are taking KALETRA. You should not breast-feed if you have HIV-1. If you are a woman who has or will have a baby while taking KALETRA, talk with your doctor about the best way to feed your baby. If your baby does not already have HIV-1, there is a chance that HIV-1 can be passed to your baby through your breast milk.

**Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take**, including prescription and non-prescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements. Many medicines interact with KALETRA. Do not start taking a new medicine without telling your doctor or pharmacist. Your doctor can tell you if it is safe to take KALETRA with other medicines. Your doctor may need to change the dose of other medicines while you take KALETRA.

### Medicines you should not take with KALETRA.

**Serious problems or death can happen if you take these medicines with KALETRA:**

- ergot containing medicines, including:
  - ergotamine tartrate (Cafergot®, Migergot, Ergomar, Ergostat, Medihaler Ergotamine, Wigraine, Wigrettes)
  - dihydroergotamine mesylate (D.H.E. 45®, Embolex, Migranal®)
  - ergonovine, ergonovine and methylergonovine (Ergotrate, Methergine), ergotamine and methylergonovine
  - Ergotrate Maleate, methylergonovine maleate (Methergine)
- triazolam (Halcion®), midazolam hydrochloride oral syrup
- pimozide (Orap®)
- the cholesterol lowering medicines lovastatin (Mevacor®) or simvastatin (Zocor®)
- sildenafil (Revatio®) only when used for the treatment of pulmonary arterial hypertension. (See "Medicines that may need changes" and "What are the

possible side effects of Kaletra?" for information about the use of sildenafil for erectile problems.)
- alfuzosin (Uroxatral®)

**Medicines that you should not take with KALETRA since they may make KALETRA not work as well:**
- the herbal supplement St. John's Wort (hypericum perforatum)
- rifampin (Rimactane®, Rifadin®, Rifater®, or Rifamate®)

**Medicines that may need changes:**
- birth control pills that contain estrogen ("the pill") or the birth control (contraceptive) patches
- certain anticancer medicines, such as nilotinib (Tasigna®) and dasatinib (Sprycel®)
- certain cholesterol lowering medicines, such as atorvastatin (Lipitor®) or rosuvastatin (Crestor®)
- certain other antiretroviral medicines, such as efavirenz (Atripla® and Sustiva®), nevirapine (Viramune®), amprenavir (Agenerase®) and nelfinavir (Viracept®)
- anti-seizure medicines, such as phenytoin (Dilantin®) carbamazepine, (Tegretol®), phenobarbital
- medicines for erectile problems, such as sildenafil (Viagra®), tadalafil (Cialis®), or vardenafil (Levitra®)
- medicines for tuberculosis (TB), such as rifabutin (Mycobutin®)
- inhaled steroid medicines, such as fluticasone propionate (Flonase®)
- inhaled medicines such as salmeterol (Serevent®) or salmeterol in combination with fluticasone propionate (Advair®). Your doctor may need to change to a different medicine
- medicines for gout, such as colchicine (Colcrys®)
- medicines to treat pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), such as bosentan (Tracleer®) or tadalafil (Adcirca®)
- pain medicines, such as fentanyl (Duragesic®, Ionsys™, Fentora®) and methadone

**If you are not sure if you are taking a medicine above, ask your doctor.**

## How should I take KALETRA?

- Take KALETRA every day exactly as prescribed by your doctor.
- It is very important to set up a dosing schedule and follow it every day.
- Do not change your treatment or stop treatment without first talking with your doctor.
- Swallow KALETRA tablets whole. Do not chew, break, or crush KALETRA tablets.
- KALETRA tablets can be taken with or without food.
- If you are taking both Videx® (didanosine) and KALETRA:
  - didanosine can be taken at the same time as KALETRA tablets, without food.
  - take didanosine either one hour before or two hours after taking KALETRA oral solution.
- Do not miss a dose of KALETRA. This could make the virus harder to treat. If you forget to take KALETRA, take the missed dose right away. If it is almost time for your next dose, do not take the missed dose. Instead, follow your regular dosing schedule by taking your next dose at its regular time. Do not take more than one dose of KALETRA at one time.
- If you take more than the prescribed dose of KALETRA, call your local poison control center or emergency room right away.
- Take KALETRA oral solution with food to help it work better.
- If KALETRA is being used for your child, tell your doctor if your child's weight changes.
- KALETRA **should not** be given one time each day in children. When giving KALETRA to your child, give KALETRA exactly as prescribed.
- KALETRA oral solution contains a large amount of alcohol.
  - If a young child drinks more than the recommended dose, it could make them sick from too much alcohol. Contact your local poison control center or emergency room right away.
  - Talk with your doctor if you take or plan to take metronidazole or disulfiram. You can have severe nausea and vomiting if you take these medicines with KALETRA.
- When your KALETRA supply starts to run low, get more from your doctor or pharmacy. It is important not to run out of KALETRA. The amount of HIV-1 virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time. The virus may become resistant to KALETRA and become harder to treat.
- KALETRA can be taken with acid reducing agents used for heartburn or reflux such as omeprazole (Prilosec®) and ranitidine (Zantac® ) with no dose adjustment.
- KALETRA should not be administered once daily in combination with carbamazepine (Tegretol® and Epitol®), phenobarbital (Luminal®), or phenytoin (Dilantin®).

Avoid doing things that can spread HIV infection. KALETRA does not stop you from passing HIV infection to others. Do not share needles, other injection equipment or personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them, like toothbrushes and razor blades. Always practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom to lower the chance of sexual contact with semen, vaginal secretions, or blood.

## What are the possible side effects of KALETRA?

**KALETRA can cause serious side effects.**
- See **"What is the most important information I should know about KALETRA?"**
- **Liver problems**. Liver problems, including death, can happen in people who take KALETRA. Blood tests in people who take KALETRA may show possible liver problems. People with liver disease such as Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C who take KALETRA may have worsening liver disease. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these signs and symptoms of liver problems:
  - loss of appetite
  - yellow skin and whites of eyes (jaundice)
  - dark-colored urine
  - pale colored stools, itchy skin
  - stomach area (abdominal) pain.
- **Inflammation of the pancreas (pancreatitis)**. Some people who take KALETRA get inflammation of the pancreas which may be serious and cause death. You have a higher chance of getting pancreatitis if you have had it before. Tell your doctor if you have nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain while taking KALETRA. These may be signs of pancreatitis.
- **Increases in certain fat (triglycerides and cholesterol) levels in your blood**. Large increases of triglycerides and cholesterol can be seen in blood test results of some people who take KALETRA. The long-term chance of getting complications such as heart attacks or stroke due to increases in triglycerides and cholesterol caused by protease inhibitors is not known at this time.
- **Diabetes and high blood sugar (hyperglycemia)**. Some people who take protease inhibitors including KALETRA get new or more serious diabetes, or high blood sugar. Tell your doctor if you notice an increase in thirst or urinate often while taking KALETRA.

- **Changes in body fat**. Changes in body fat in some people who take antiretroviral therapy. These changes may include increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck ("buffalo hump"), breast, and around the trunk. Loss of fat from the legs, arms and face may also happen. The cause and long-term health effects of these conditions are not known at this time.
- **Increased bleeding for hemophiliacs**. Some people with hemophilia have increased bleeding with protease inhibitors including KALETRA.
- **Increased risk of certain problems when you take medicines used for the treatment of erectile problems such as sildenafil (Viagra®), tadalafil (Cialis®), or vardenafil (Levitra®) with KALETRA:**
  - **low blood pressure**. If you get dizzy or faint, you need to lie down. Tell your doctor if you feel dizzy, or have fainting spells.
  - **vision changes**. Tell your doctor right away if you have vision changes.
  - **penis erection lasting more than 4 hours**. If you are a male and have an erection that lasts longer than 4 hours, get medical help right away to avoid permanent damage to your penis. Your doctor can explain these symptoms to you.
- **Allergic reactions**. Skin rashes, some of them severe, can occur in people who take KALETRA. Tell your healthcare provider if you had a rash when you took another medicine for your HIV infection or if you notice any skin rash when you take KALETRA.

Common side effects of KALETRA include:

- diarrhea
- nausea
- stomach area (abdominal) pain
- feeling weak
- vomiting
- headache
- upset stomach

These are not all of the possible side effects of KALETRA. For more information, ask your doctor or pharmacist. Tell your doctor about any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088.

## How should I store KALETRA?

**KALETRA tablets:**

- Store KALETRA tablets at room temperature, between 59°F to 86°F (15°C to 30°C).
- Do not keep KALETRA tablets out of the container it comes in for longer than 2 weeks, especially in areas where there is a lot of humidity. Keep the container closed tightly.

**KALETRA oral solution:**

- Store KALETRA oral solution in a refrigerator, between 36°F to 46°F (2°C to 8°C). KALETRA oral solution that is kept refrigerated may be used until the expiration date printed on the label.
- KALETRA oral solution that is stored at room temperature (less than 77°F or 25°C) should be used within 2 months.
- Keep KALETRA away from high heat.

Throw away any medicine that is out of date or that you no longer need.

**Keep KALETRA and all medicines out of the reach of children.**

## General information about KALETRA

KALETRA does not cure HIV-1 or AIDS. The long-term effects of KALETRA are not known at this time. People taking KALETRA may still get opportunistic infections or other conditions that happen with HIV-1 infection. Some of these conditions are pneumonia, herpes virus infections, and *Mycobacterium avium* complex (MAC) infections.

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a Medication Guide. Do not use KALETRA for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give KALETRA to other people, even if they have the same condition you have. It may harm them.

This Medication Guide summarizes the most important information about KALETRA. If you would like more information, talk with your doctor. You can ask your pharmacist or doctor for information about KALETRA that is written for health professionals. For more information about KALETRA call 1-800-633-9110 or go to www.KALETRA.com.

What are the ingredients in KALETRA?

Active ingredient: lopinavir and ritonavir

Inactive ingredients:

**KALETRA 200 mg lopinavir and 50 mg ritonavir tablets:** copovidone, sorbitan monolaurate, colloidal silicon dioxide, and sodium stearyl fumarate. The film coating contains: hypromellose, titanium dioxide, polyethylene glycol 400, hydroxypropyl cellulose, talc, colloidal silicon dioxide, polyethylene glycol 3350, yellow ferric oxide 172, and polysorbate 80.

**KALETRA 100 mg lopinavir and 25 mg ritonavir tablets:** copovidone, sorbitan monolaurate, colloidal silicon dioxide, and sodium stearyl fumarate. The film coating contains: polyvinyl alcohol, titanium dioxide, talc, polytheylene glycol 3350, and yellow ferric oxide E172.

**KALETRA oral solution:** acesulfame potassium, alcohol, artificial cotton candy flavor, citric acid, glycerin, high fructose corn syrup, Magnasweet-110 flavor, menthol, natural and artificial vanilla flavor, peppermint oil, polyoxyl 40 hydrogenated castor oil, povidone, propylene glycol, saccharin sodium, sodium chloride, sodium citrate, and water.

**KALETRA oral solution contains 42.4% alcohol (v/v). "See How should I take KALETRA?".**

KALETRA Tablets, 200 mg lopinavir/50 mg ritonavir
Manufactured by Abbott Pharmaceuticals PR Ltd., Barceloneta, PR 00617
for Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, IL 60064, U.S.A.

KALETRA Tablets, 100 mg lopinavir/25 mg ritonavir and KALETRA Oral Solution
Abbott Laboratories, North Chicago, IL 60064, U.S.A.

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This Medication Guide has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

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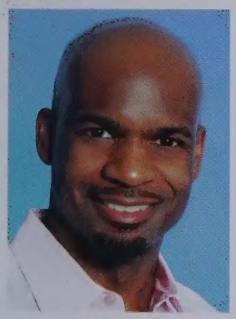

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# From the Editor

This issue of *SWERV* is dedicated to the wonderful lesbians of the black LGBT community. Just as in general society, women are often overlooked in the gay community, but lesbians have been just as influential in politics, art, music, sports, health and education. They are on the front lines fighting for equal rights, same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws.

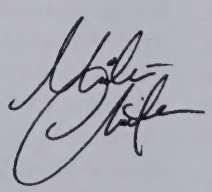
Musician Toshi Reagon has been making noise in the music industry for nearly 30 years and has shared the stage with superstars such as Nona Hendryx, Elvis Costello, Ani DiFranco, Lizz Wright and Me'shell NdegéOcello. She comes from a musical family, so talent was in great supply—which is the sole reason Toshi has survived both the wavering music industry and the notion that only soul-singing divas can make it.

Out author Jacqueline Woodson has written an astounding 30 books, won multiple awards and gained attention and praise along the way. Her books deal with issues like teen pregnancy, tolerance and race. And to think this amazing writer began writing from telling stories as a child—but not "once upon a time" stories; as she puts it, "outright lies." It was those tall tales which led to her wonderful body of work.

Zanele Muholi, the world-renowned South African photographer, bravely documents LGBT issues in Africa where being gay can be deadly. Muholi's work has been shown in Johannesburg, Milan, Lagos and, soon, São Paulo. Aside from capturing images, this trailblazer has worked as community relations officer for the Forum for the Empowerment of Women (FEW) and reporter for e-zine *Behind the Mask*.

Film buff Angel Brown-Ross took her passion for the movies and created the Queer Black Cinema (QBC) International Film Festival in Harlem, which takes place this October. Angel has also launched a new LGBT magazine called *Cinematiq*.

Also in this issue, learn about up coming rapper Ace Reign; and Steven G. Fullwood looks at the lives of effeminate men. So call your best girlfriend and enjoy *SWERV*'s celebration!



Michael-Christopher
Editor-in-Chief

# BIG, LOVELY AND THRIVING: TOSHI REAGON (+ ONE)

Words/L. Michael Gipson
Photos/ Bernie DeChant

*Toshi Reagon has been a preternatural force in the music business over the last three decades. Since her 1990 debut,* Justice, *the unconventional Reagon has been pushing the boundaries of what is socially and commercially acceptable for black women artists, especially one who's been openly lesbian since day one. Despite being born of an enviable pedigree as the daughter of Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock, Reagon's rise was anything but a foregone conclusion. In an era of Lycra jumpsuits, big weave and manufactured vocals, Toshi Reagon came along as a dreadlocked, full-figured blues, folk and rock singer whose voice had all the power of the ancestors.*

*Despite the long odds, Reagon survived over scores of black female artists who have come and gone in those years. Nine solo albums, several production credits and the launch of her own label imprint later, Reagon is hotter than ever—from performing for President Barack Obama to co-producing Lizz Wright's forthcoming album,* Fellowship. SWERV *had the chance to catch up with the Big Lovely entrepreneur to get the lowdown.*

***SWERV: Your mother founded Sweet Honey in the Rock, your father [Cordell Hull Reagon] was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) civil rights icon who also co-founded the Freedom Singers with your mother, and folk legend Pete Seeger was your godfather. As a girl had you ever considered being anything other than a socially conscious musician?***

**Toshi Reagon:** I thought I would be an athlete, particularly a football player. I love football. I love sports. Yankees/Jets/Knicks/Liberty—my favorite baller is Kevin Garnett. I was raised by my mom, who raised me to be whatever I wanted to be, who loved me completely, and worked her ass off so that I had a wide-open space to look at in terms of what was possible for me. She listened to me when it was clear that I was heading toward music. She was incredibly supportive. I am into rock. My early bands were Labelle, Zeppelin, Kiss, Black Sabbath, Fleetwood Mac, and, yes, she would slip a few blues records in so I would know where that music came from. Big Mama Thornton, Big Bill Broonzy, Howlin' Wolf—these are masters of all things musical in American pop music, hip-hop, dance, folk, metal and whatever. My mom is good people.

***SWERV: How did you secure your first record deal?***
**TR:** I have just been informed by the writer Eva Yaa Asantewaa that I have been doing this for almost thirty years. Yikes! I say, really? She wrote my most current bio. I have the same spirit and bright eyes for music that I ever had. My first record was on the old folk label, Flying Fish. They gave me no money. They just put out what I had already done. Soon after, I was opening for Lenny Kravitz's first world tour. Flying Fish was good folks, but they could not do anything in terms of supporting an artist; I got the tour on my own. After that, I was signed to Elektra Records. That record never came out, but I met Nona Hendryx, my favorite member of Labelle. She became one of my music mothers, along with my mom and the rock guitarist and producer June Millington.

***SWERV: How does performing a spiritual or field song resonate for you when compared to a folk or rock song?***
**TR:** I do all kinds of music. It all has to feel right coming out of my mouth. I don't fake anything. I don't lie about the sound I can make with my body. It is the most sacred thing I have other than breathing. My mom talks about black people being kidnapped from home and sold into slavery. What is it that we held on to? The sound we make. The sound that comes from us is our home, is our house. It is important to keep our sound language current and contemporary. It is important to pass on and hold our sound from generation to generation. It is our survival weapon. It is our anchor. So no matter what I sing, that is there.

***SWERV: As a legacy keeper of folk and black roots music, how important is it to you to share, educate and make relevant for the next generation the songs/music that sustained black people for centuries?***
**TR:** Collaboration is my favorite thing to do. It is very important for me to work with different artists, from different generations, and share everything. Young folks change and grow everything. It is so important to give them the space to do that.

***SWERV: You're an out black lesbian musician performing alternative music for a sitting president. How does that happen?***
**TR:** I don't know how I seem to other folks. I have a path. I am on it till I die. Obama is incredible. I beg people to look beyond the headlines and reach deep to see the work he is doing. We must also not ignore the viciousness of the attacks against him. It is an attack against us. There is a huge machine geared toward tearing him down. History has shown that [we're] a country that was started on the ideals of justice and equality for all, but it's really only for a very narrow group of the population, mainly property-owning white men. People always have a horrible time when that original idea of justice and equality for all gets widened. People lose their damn minds. That is what we are swimming in. I ask myself, is there not a disaster big enough to bring us together? The answer is no.

When I went into the White House, the only pictures of people of color I saw were the Obamas. I didn't see the whole White House, so maybe it is different in other places [of the house]. That is a friggin' problem.

My friend Ani DiFranco reminded me to be myself [for my White House performance]. I wore my Baracklyn T-shirt and rocked out with my mom and the Freedom Singers. I met Michelle Obama and the President. They are the most gracious and kind people ever. Yes, they are as beautiful in person. They were made for the job they are doing.

I was there because Obama has opened the door to the White House wide. It is significant because I think he is one of the first presidents that we have had that welcome all of the people living in America, not just folks he is comfortable with or who gave him money. It is a crazy job and you cannot satisfy the whole of the population. But I think he tries to welcome the diversity that is here.

***SWERV: In public, you've been relatively nonchalant about your sexuality and androgynous presentation since your 1990 debut. Where does that ease and self-love come from and how can others get a little of that in their own lives?***
**TR:** (Laughs) Androgynous. My people raised me right. I grew up with all kinds of people around. Don't pick on your kids about how they look. Tell them they are beautiful, ask them what they think, listen more than you talk. I am so loved. I feel right in my skin, I feel right on time. I try to keep it simple. I understand how wealthy I am on this planet. I feel lucky to not be under the stress and oppression that other people in the world are under. To wake up in the morning and worry about water is terrible. I will not waste the good position that I am in. I am in the great company of a powerful and committed community that challenges and focuses me.

***SWERV: You've been partnered for ages and raising a daughter in a same-sex family for years. Yet historically marriage hasn't always been kind to women. As a womanist in a long-term same-sex partnership, how do you feel about marriage equality for women?***
**TR:** My mom was married to my dad, and when they got divorced the judge ordered my dad to pay $25 a month for child support. There were two kids. My mom's lawyer said that's not enough, so he raised it to $40. I mean come on, the judge is protecting him over two kids. My pops (R.I. P. daddy) never paid it.

Marriage is not in my near future. We are committed to each other for life no matter what, but [there will be] no trip to some other state for a "legal" marriage. I support my friends who want to get married. I asked Bob if she would let me share her thoughts on marriage. Here you go:

**J. Bob Alotta** (filmmaker/activist/cultural instigator): In all my years as a thinking, conscious, politically savvy, queer, colored person, I have never before let the Right, or the government in general, set my

*continued on page 28*

# WRITING FOR A BETTER WORLD

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker
Photo/Marty Umans

*You will find her in classrooms, libraries and children's bookshelves around the world. Her ideas, sense of hope and voice for those young people who at times may feel like they don't have one of their own—they're all in the pages of her award-winning books. Jacqueline Woodson is one of the most heralded writers of literature for young readers of our time. She also happens to be an out lesbian of African descent. The list of accolades for her work stretches long, and includes the Caldecott Honor for* Coming on Home Soon*; a Coretta Scott King Honor and National Book Award finalist for* Locomotion *and Coretta Scott King Award for* Miracle's Boys*; a Newbery Honor Medal for* Feathers *and* Show Way*; and the American Library Association Best Book for Young Adults award for her works* Hush, Miracle's Boys *and* If You Come Softly. *(A complete list is available at www.jacquelinewoodson.com.) Woodson's books for young people help encourage them to re-imagine and understand themselves and the world they live in—the one they inherit and can make better. Woodson took a moment to speak with me about her work.*

***SWERV: The idea of community is a theme in many of your books. Why is that so important to you?***

**Jacqueline Woodson:** I think community is important to many people of color in that we are often raised in them, more so than in nuclear families. I believe strongly in community and think they help broaden our thinking and allow us to see a bigger world, so naturally this would come across in my writing.

***SWERV: How did your experiences as a teenager inform and influence your current work?***

**JW:** A lot of who I was seems to go into the creation of my characters. Although I grew up in a Southern, religious family, I was allowed some leeway and exposed to lots of ways of thinking and being. Our community was diverse in so many ways—economically, ethnically, you name it—that person either lived on our block or visited it during the summer. So I was constantly seeing and watching and, as a result, my characters are watchers and thinkers...and ultimately doers.

***SWERV: Have you ever been afraid that your books would be deemed too controversial for discussing things like teen pregnancy, relationships or sexuality?***

**JW:** My books get "challenged" and censored left and right and sideways but it doesn't stop me. I'm not writing for the people who want to silence me, I'm writing for myself and for those who need to hear the voices of my characters (and, by extension, their own voice) in the world.

***SWERV: The stories you write often challenge their characters and typically their young readers to push beyond boundaries of race, gender and class. If you were asked to write a book targeted at gay adults, what themes do you think you would explore?***

**JW:** The same themes I explore in all of my books. My books are for queer people and straight people. As a community, we're all struggling with the same thing—that need for tolerance, understanding and hope. I don't ever want a gay teen to not see some part of themselves in my books. But I also want all teens to see themselves. So I wouldn't do anything different.

***SWERV: When you were a young girl, did you ever imagine that you'd be writing books for young people as an adult?***

**JW:** I knew I'd be writing but not like this. I had no idea I'd have this body of work in the world and be able to write about things that really, really matter to me. It's kind of amazing.

***SWERV: What would you say has been the highlight of your career thus far?***

**JW:** I think there are many. I think being able to write and have a family and watch my children grow up to read my books (even though my daughter, at 8, said yesterday, "I have to say, I'm not a fan of your work, Mommy"). But it's big to be able to be in the world this way. I love that I've gotten a lot of medal and plaques and stickers for my books. I love walking into classrooms and the kids having read the stuff that started in my head. I don't know... the list goes on and on. I've written nearly thirty books now and each time, it's different, and a sometimes amazingly wonderful experience.

***SWERV: What do you find most enjoyable about writing?***

**JW:** I love being able to think deeply about the lives of other people, to have the space to sit with an idea and slowly shape that idea into a world. I love when I've figured out what the story is trying to say and when the characters begin to come alive because of this. And I love when I finish a book.

***SWERV: Presumably, you explore real life complexities of identity in your books aimed at young people because you have the confidence that they can consume them, analyze them and move in their own directions in their search for self and how they see themselves in the world around them. Do you think our society offers them enough of these opportunities?***

**JW:** That's a really good question, and I don't know if I can answer it well. I think it's ultimately up to the family/ community to give the child a bigger vision of a greater good. But too often, adults don't want to see too much of the world and definitely don't want their children to see it. So if adults want to wear blinders, then their children are going to grow up with limited vision. But if people are open, then their children will be.

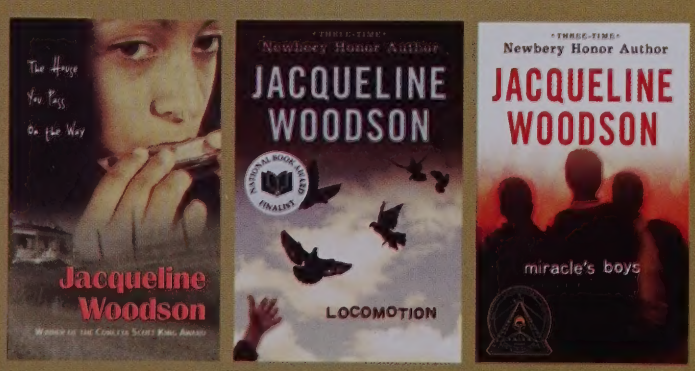
***SWERV: What are your favorite books?***

**JW:** I have so many I don't even know where to begin. The ones I come back to always, though, are *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Another Country* by James Baldwin; *The Cancer Journals* by Audre Lorde; the poems of Cornelius Eady and Nick Flynn; the stories of Raymond Carver; *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor; *American Negro Poetry: An Anthology*, edited by Arna Bontemps; *The Miseducation of the Negro* by Carter G. Woodson; *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia Maclachlan... the list really does go on and on...

***SWERV: What can we expect to see from you next?***

**JW:** *Pecan Pie Baby* is coming out in October of this year. It's a picture book. My play *Locomotion* is opening at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. on October 23, 2010. Another picture book, *Each Kindness*, will be out in 2011, as will a young adult novel that I need to get back to after this interview!

*Learn more about Jacqueline Woodson and her books at www.jacquelinewoodson.com.*




*Just a taste of the 30 books penned by Jacqueline Woodson: The House You Pass on the Way, Locomotion and Miracle's Boys.*

# PICTURE THIS:

## The Photography of Zanele Muholi

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker

*Miss Lesbian I.*
*Amsterdam, 2009*
*Self-portrait.*

As a child growing up in South Africa, Zanele Muholi says that she was fascinated by the idea of taking pictures and memorializing moments and images in time. In her Zulu community it was primarily the role of men to be behind the lens, with the power to choose what and how images would be captured for the record. Women were typically framed through the eyes and gaze of men as the men saw them, and not necessarily how they saw themselves. Muholi began taking pictures at family gatherings and other informal events as a way to explore the power of the lens and to claim that power for herself.

Born in Umlazi township in Durban in 1972, she matured in an age in which her country underwent rapid transformation and political transition during and after apartheid.

*Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta, Ext. 2, Lakeside, Johannesburg 2007*

As an adult she worked many years in Johannesburg as a human rights activist. Muholi's participation in the Market Photo Workshop in 2001, however, opened her up to a type of visual activism: She could combine and fully assert her passion, artistry, activism and desire to be an archivist of truth. Muholi says, "I began to wonder in 2001 how I could turn myself and my community from being objectified to become the producers of our own histories, knowledges and subjectivities. My objective was to produce work for the very same subjects I would capture, in order for them/us/me to see our likenesses, and for the future generations to have a point of reference in our collective memories, in the archives, and beyond."

*Katlego Mashiloane and Nosipho Lavuta, Ext. 2, Lakeside, Johannesburg 2007*

The "them/us/me" that Muholi speaks of is black African lesbian women. Historically, stories about the lives of these women have not been told in full and, when they have, they weren't told by the subjects themselves. Muholi uses her photography to allow this to happen. She uses her camera to highlight images of diverse black African lesbians in their relationships with themselves and others in raw, real and natural ways. Her work depicts tragedy and triumph of the human spirit, manifestations of love and hate, and always what, simply, is.

One of her most exciting and much discussed contributions to the world was her research paper, *Mapping Our Histories: A visual history of black lesbians in post-Apartheid South Africa.* Muholi says she created it for two reasons: "First, because we do not yet have such a history in the form of representation; and second, because like the drawing of a road map full of roads, rivers, cities, mountain ranges and valleys, our black lesbian history is not linear, but crisscrosses and intersects with our race, gender, sexuality, class and colonial histories."

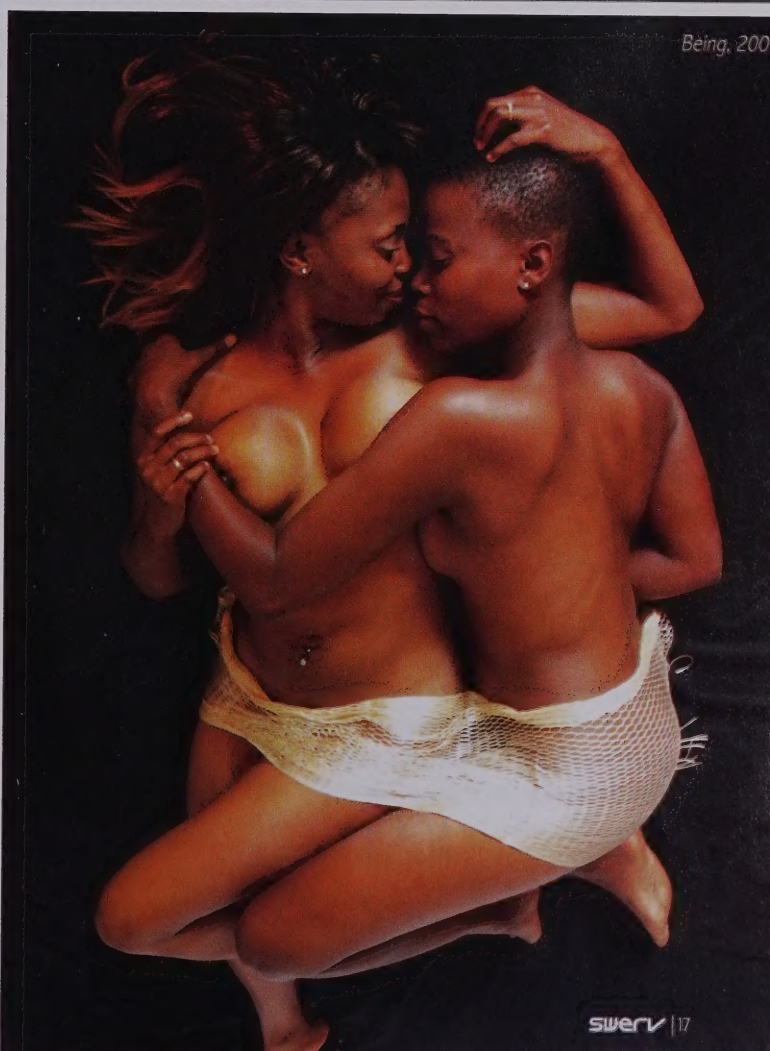
Lerato Nkutha, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 2010

Shirley Ndaba, Braamfontein, Johannesburg, 201

Since completing her advanced study in photography at the Market Workshop she has gained tremendous experience and notoriety. After having her work featured in group exhibitions for several years, in spring 2004 she had her first solo exhibition at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, *Visual Sexuality: Only Half the Picture*. Her solo exhibition toured internationally in 2006. Another show followed in 2008 at Le Case d'Arte, Milan, and later she exhibited alongside Lucy Azubuike at the CCA, Lagos in Nigeria. She has been the recipient of the Tollman Award for the Visual Arts, the BHP Billiton/Wits University Visual Arts Fellowship, and was the 2009 Ida Ely Rubin Artist-in-Residence at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 2009 she also received her master of fine arts degree in documentary media from Ryerson University in Toronto.

Muholi uses her work as a platform to make visible those who others would keep invisible, spark conversations about hate crimes and unfair treatment of lesbian women in her country, and educate and inspire others about a human experience. She continues to be an advocate for social justice—through her own work, and through Photo Experience (XP), a program she initiated to put cameras in the hands of other lesbian women so that they, too, can frame them/us/me for themselves.

Muholi is expected to have her work shown at the São Paulo Biennial this fall. For more information visit www.zanelemuholi.com.



Being, 200

# Helping lesbians and bi women get healthy

Words/Leslie Calman

*What are barriers to good health for lesbian and bisexual women? And how do we remove those barriers?*

Health and health behaviors are influenced by a multitude of factors, including public policies, the actions of community organizations, government, individual choices and environment. And for lesbian and bisexual women a social environment of prejudice and stigma continues to play a major role in determining health, by

- creating stress,
- encouraging depression and anxiety,
- allowing violence, and
- limiting economic resources—which in this country means limiting health care services.

But there are counter-influences: A strong sense of community can improve one's outlook and mental health. And there are a number of public policy and hospital policy improvements that can be made.

## Mental health

Researchers talk about a syndrome of "minority stress" experienced by members of any minority group that experience a cumulative, chronic and additive stress stemming from repeated small- and large-scale social discrimination and alienation. There is evidence of somewhat higher depression and anxiety rates among adult lesbians than heterosexuals; and much more severe depression and anxiety rates among lesbian and bisexual teens than among heterosexual teens.

Research shows that when people perceive that they lack the support of family, friends and coworkers, they are more likely to experience mental health difficulties. Indeed, rejection by one's family is strongly associated with mental illness in LGBT individuals. Where there's community and family support, these are important protections.

We also know that when women are "out" they are more likely to have positive self-esteem, and better mental health—but we don't know which of these causes the other. Are lesbians happier when they're out? Or out when they're happier?

## Another health issue is violence

Lesbian women experience more violence from strangers than their heterosexual peers, with the highest rates experienced by butch women. Lesbians also report more physical assaults in childhood than heterosexual women do—many studies suggest that victimization against sexual minorities is common in our schools. Violence is particularly prevalent among male to female transgender people, and particularly transwomen of color.

Lesbians also experience partner violence, but at lower reported rates than heterosexual women. Still, the real rates may be higher; embarrassment and unwillingness to deal with the authorities when reporting lesbian partner violence may well account for limited reporting.

## How do we deal with these problems?

Possibly in response, there are a number of self-destructive behaviors within the community. These behaviors are often ascribed simply to stress. It may be more complicated, though; some of these behaviors are condoned and encouraged by the community as a rejection of "straight norms." And that's unfortunate, because it's unhealthy.

One of these behaviors is smoking. Smoking, of course, is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States, causing lung cancer and increasing the risk of heart disease and many other cancers. Some studies report two lesbian/bisexual women smokers for every heterosexual female smoker.

Another destructive behavior is alcohol abuse: Lesbian and bi women use alcohol more frequently, in higher amounts, and experience higher alcohol-related morbidity than heterosexual women. Studies show that twice as many lesbians are "heavy drinkers"—that is, 60 or more drinks per month—than heterosexual women. Our social life may play a role in this.

And then there's obesity, which is more prevalent among LBT women than among heterosexual women, with negative implications for heart disease and cancer. Some researchers have hypothesized that LBT women tend toward overweight because they do not strive to meet cultural expectations of body size. Lesbian consistently report higher ideal weights than heterosexual women, as well as less preoccupation with weight, lower drives for thinness, and higher attractiveness ratings for heavier (though not necessarily overweight) women.

The relative sense of ease around weight has its positive mental health points—but it also has negative implications for cancers, heart disease and diabetes.

## Access and avoidance

Finally, perhaps the largest issue in lesbian health is we have poor health outcomes because of not seeing physicians regularly and getting screened or treated.

Why is this? We are underinsured. Marriage is a strong predictor of health insurance, and women are far more likely than men to be covered under another person's (usually a husband's) policy. (The new federal policies broadening insurance coverage is good news for our community. Legal marriage for same-sex partners would also be a big help.)

And perhaps most important is this: We have had negative health-care experiences, ranging from non-inclusion to outright hostility. These past negative experiences make us reluctant to seek care; lesbians delay health-seeking behaviors until they are symptomatic or until symptoms are at their worst. And of course, that delay—the failure to have mammograms and Pap tests, the failure to have diabetes or high blood pressure diagnosed—can be fatal.

## Some positive solutions

Mautner Project, a 20-year old organization dedicated to improving the health of lesbian and bisexual women and transgender people, attacks these problems in several ways.

- We train doctors and other health care professionals. Our "Removing the Barriers" training teaches providers how to create welcoming environments, how to be sensitive and aware, and what particular health issues exist in the lesbian/bi community. We make this training available to health care providers around the country.
- We do outreach in the community to inform us of the need to get regular screenings for cancer, heart disease and diabetes, and to help women to access those screenings.
- And we provide hands-on assistance to help lesbians/bisexual women to quit smoking, and to attain a healthier weight

Improving our awareness and helping our sisters to get the care they need are tasks everyone in the community can participate in. Buddy up: Take a friend to her mammogram, remind her about that annual exam, go with her to the doctor's office if she needs. Our community—taking care of each other—is our greatest strength.

*Leslie Calman, Ph.D. is the executive director of the Mautner Project in Washington, D.C.*



# Equality: Think local this election season

Words/Rev. Darlene Nipper

My experience of friends and colleagues who are black and lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) is that most of us are law abiding, often church-going, hardworking people living in local communities as neighbors, friends, family members and colleagues. We are everywhere, from urban centers to suburban and rural areas. We face all of the challenges and opportunities that others face, and our experience simply being visible in this world is often met with vitriolic rhetoric, hatred and violence. I was sadly reminded of this when a colleague sent a statistic to me from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs' 2009 "LGBTQ Hate Violence Report," released last month, which found that 50 percent of all anti-LGBTQ bias murder victims in 2009 were people of color. Given the connections between and across communities, and the reality of our lives stretching across multiple identities, we have a unique opportunity this election cycle to act boldly from any corner of our lives and potentially affect all of our lives.

As I've heard talk about the midterm elections over these last few weeks and months, I've thought we've focused too heavily on Congress alone. I know that this Congress was going to be our panacea, but thinking of this Congress I can't help but remember the lyrics to the Janet Jackson song, "What Have You Done for Me Lately?" You know the lyrics: "Used to be a time when you would pamper me / used to brag about it all the time / your friends seem to think that you're so peachy keen / but my friends say neglect is on your mind / who's right?" Yes, having a strong progressive leadership in Congress is critical to advancing policies that are meaningful to our communities. Yes, we have major concerns that apparently only Congress can fully address. And I think we are giving entirely too much time and attention solely to Congress, which is likely to continue to have difficulty effectively passing legislation that results in anything resembling the full equality and security that we seek.

I have friends and/or family members who have nearly lost their homes because of economic insecurity, some who are unemployed because of discrimination, some who are hardworking but fear deportation due to their immigration status, and others who are federal employees and can't put their partners on their health insurance policy because of federal legal restrictions. Newsflash: The jury is still out on the 111th United States Congress. Yes, Congress is critical and we should give them ample attention in this cycle, but Congress isn't the only place where we need strong progressive leadership.

Thinking forward to the midterms and about the policymakers needed to effectively address the concerns of the multiple communities in which I live, I am reminded that 1) I have to vote; 2) I have to implore the people around me — including those on the cushions in the meditation halls and in the pews of the churches that I frequent — to vote with me; and 3) I have to remember that elusive notion of equality that I seek — though its impact stretches to the far ends of this country's borders and beyond — really begins at home.

That's why I think our midterm election focus should be on local and state leaders as much as it is on Congress. In this midterm cycle alone 46 states—all except Louisiana, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia—will hold elections for state legislatures, and 37 governors will be elected

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# Show us Your GLO

Words/Michael-Christopher

Maurice Jamal, the man who brought us such films as *Ski Trip*, *Dirty Laundry* and the series *Friends & Lovers*, is the force behind the first urban LGBT television network, GLO TV. This enormous undertaking is "the most important thing I've ever done," he says. "A course correction. A new chapter." Jamal's goal with GLO is to help create opportunities for others to tell their stories showing all of who and what we are.

Although we have a black president, we are in no way living in a post-racial society, and discrimination against sexual orientation also still exists—two things to overcome in television, an industry that clearly caters to white heterosexuals. "I have sat across from the presidents of every major network you think would be interested in this content: Logo, MTV, BET, TV1, HereTV, QTV, which is defunct now... and there's always sort of this, 'Oh that's really great—but not really what we do.' And for the gay channels I think the content has been too urban for them," Jamal says. Jamal thinks they're just not interested in telling the stories of people of color, which is evident in their lineups. He adds that even with all the people he's worked with at BET it's clear that the network is not open to featuring programming for gay America.

Despite the odds stacked against him, Jamal has pressed on. He took the advice of his pastor, who says that if you're trying to do something and don't like the results, then you need to do something different. "GLO represents that difference," he says. He also took a page from the many successful self-published authors who have "put on their good walking shoes," and he went from city to city, Pride to Pride, and talked up GLO. He also cites "denial" as a part of his process; he ignored how hard it really was going to be. Most importantly, with all the networks turning him down, he kept in mind that "just because somebody says 'no' doesn't mean that it's not a good idea," he says. "I'm not trying to get an automatic 'yes.'"

Jamal has been working in the entertainment industry since he was 13 years old, so he knows how to work a "no" into something better. A classically trained Shakespearean actor, the Oakland native started in theater, then wrote, directed and produced for the African-American Shakespeare Company and The National Black Actors' Group in the Bay Area.

Needing a new challenge, Jamal moved to New York, broke into film and television, then landed on *Chappelle's Show* as assistant director. One day, the executive producer found the script to *Ski Trip* in the office (Jamal had been sneaking in at night to make copies) and questioned Jamal about the project. After explaining he was working on his first film, she gave Jamal time off, insisting he pursue his dreams.

Years later, after selling the film to MTV, Jamal returned for a season and she told him he shouldn't come back. "She told me, 'You gotta keep doing what you do. You're on a trajectory.'" Jamal learned a valuable lesson from the experience. "We don't recognize how important our allies can be to us," he says. "[Many times] as gays and lesbians we don't give [others] an opportunity to support us because we assume the reaction is going to be negative."

After hours of hard work and "lots of caffeine," GLO will go live on September 3 and debut on the Internet with an ambitious 20 shows. Its next phases will include cable and on-demand programming. There will also be a distribution arm delivering music downloads and film on DVD. Some programming will cross all platforms, while others will only be available on cable and/or on-demand.

GLO boasts its share of star power. Some of the featured actors include Terrell Carter (*Zane's Sex Chronicles*), Rodney Chester (*Noah's Arc*), Ray Cunningham (*College Hill*), Jackée Harry (*Sister, Sister; Everybody Hates Chris*), DeMarco Majors (*Shirts & Skins*), Saaphyri (*Flava of Love*) and Sheryl Lee Ralph (*Moesha*).

Programming will include sitcoms, news, health and wellness, and docuseries. Jamal's *Friends & Lovers* will air on the network along with *Girl Power*, a reality competition program where lesbian filmmakers can have a film funded and shown on GLO. *I Am Hip-Hop* delves in the world of rap music and its precarious relationship with the gay community. On *Sex 2010* the network explores everything sexual, from the mysteries of lesbian sex to why men have sex in parks. GLO has also picked up the Internet series *Christopher Street* and *Drama Queenz*.

There is one type of show we wont see just yet on GLO. "As a kid my favorite job would be captain of the Enterprise," Jamal says. "I'd like to do a really good, interesting and compelling sci-fi show with gay characters. But it has to be done right."

Jamal's overall concern with the network is quality, staying true to the vision. He doesn't want anyone to watch just because its urban and gay. "I don't want viewership by default," he says. "I want them to watch it because it's good." And if it's good, we all shine.

For more information visit www.glotvnetwork.com.

# Femme Men: On the Front Line?

Words/Steven G. Fullwood

Nobody messed with Tony. The first time I saw him I knew he was different. Dancer body Tony. Silly, loud Tony. Mess with him, and he would have put a hurting-on-you-for-certain Tony. Tonvy was three grades ahead of me. He was a good-looking, ropy thin brown boy who was born in tight blue basketball shorts that showed a little more than his mama would have liked. In the summer, Tony and his friends—I call them the Tonettes—would skate up and down my street, singing and dancing, laughing from the time I spotted them until the trio faded into the distance, an unofficial gay black boy parade 1974, in Toledo, Ohio.

Then there was Michael. This Clevelander came to Toledo to attend college. I sat behind him in English class. One day he caught me staring at him, and introduced himself and we became friends. Michael was a 2nd degree black belt and wore black nail polish on his toes. "Sweet" is what my father would have called him. Michael beat up a boy one day at school who called him a fag. Sweet put his black nail-polished foot in that boy's ass.

I knew why people were afraid of Tony and Michael. Here were two effeminate men—or femme men—who were themselves. Both exuded confidence. Both their demeanors announced: *I do not take mess from anyone, not you or your mama.* But allow me to back up. What exactly is a "femme" man?

I would describe a femme man as someone who identifies as or whose gender performance is decidedly female; it's a definition that is admittedly far from concrete. For example, while I exhibit effeminacies, and happily so, I do not consider myself a femme man. However, you might consider my emotional presence, optimistic life outlook and my singing like Chaka Khan as decidedly un-male.

Clearly your perspective, what you think of as truth, is solely about *you*—how you see and perceive and value your gender role. How you feel about gender roles and attitudes determines where I land—or fall and break—on a scale, subjective and riddled with complexity.

One thing that became evident as I conducted research for this article is that femme, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. While sexual identity is not an exclusive marker of effeminacy in males, the men I interviewed were same-gender-loving (SGL), gay or homo and a few identified as femme, or formerly femme. Each had overlapping ways of describing femme men and effeminacy similar to my own. A few of the men I approached for their opinions about femme men, who in fact appeared femme to me, were insulted by the inference. Why, I do not know, but I speculate that being seen as femme is… well, let's deal with our definitions first, shall we?

"A femme man is any man—gay, straight or bisexual—that is connected to his feminine side in manner, emotionally, psychologically or physically," says Tyrus, 30, who considers himself feminine yet masculine. Travis, 32, who identifies as femme, feels freedom to express himself "using whatever phrases, mannerisms or gestures" strike him. "Some of those [qualities] are definitely feminine," he adds. "Having a little sugar in your tank may be fine, but femme is when people can see the sugar before they taste it," said Clarence, 30, who also identifies as femme. "It is in my case the sashay of my swag, the untraditionally high voice, the melody in my tone and the expressiveness of my hand gestures. It is my expression of self that is contrary to the idea that men are stiff, not expressive."

"Society and our black gay culture have decided and constructed what it means to be masculine—not a man, really—and I don't fall into that construct," says Clarence thoughtfully. He paraphrases another black gay feminine man, author James Baldwin, when he says, '"I am black only so long as you think that you are white.'"

"I would define 'femme' as having an identity that revels in performing the social definitions of what is gendered feminine," says Kenyon, 35, who at one time defined himself as femme. "It could be the way you walk, talk, how you dress, gesture, the way you view the world and power." Nigel, 31, believes that "a femme man I guess would be someone who is masculine in body only, with everything else being 'feminine,' dress, posture, speech, etc."

"I embody both essences," Charly, 29, says. He considers himself both masculine and feminine. "I prefer to feel what I feel when I feel it. When I am most comfortable I display femininity; and when I have to go out into the unknown, leave my house, [possibly] meet new people, and maybe defend myself, I display masculinity."

A masculine presence is undoubtedly an asset in a sexist culture. Instinctively I knew this as a child. As a kid I was teased for being feminine. From what I gather now it was centered not solely in what I did (express myself) but how I did it (with a flair.) Perpetually pressured to "act male" by my father, relatives and any random man who saw fit to regulate my behavior, I struggled mightily to be seen as masculine, often failing at it. Instead of roughhousing, I much preferred to sing along with Diana Ross and Sylvester. Unlike Tony and Michael, I knew I had no such fierceness burning inside, or a degree in karate with which to protect myself.

"I am masculine because it is my warrior self, it is who I have to become to blend in, to deal with my exterior world," says Charly. "The masculine is my force field; it is my protection, it is my rock that I hide under, and it is what repels things and people that can hurt me."

That hurt manifested—for me, anyway—in looking on men like Michael and Tony with a mix of awe, wonder and resentment. How dare they be who they are? I chose not to. I saw their sense of freedom as too risky. This bird of a feather simply ignored that flock altogether. That feeling of disconnect stunted me emotionally, and it took some time for me to develop strong and meaningful connections with other men.

"The premium is on acting heterosexual," says Travis, who points out the complications and contradictions on how masculine and femme members of

*continued on page 27*

## BRIAN SLADE aka Ton3x *Dawn o' the Unicorn*

Sometimes when life gets you down, you wish you could be somebody else. There's no denying the high-profile and highly criticized gospel superstar Ton3x has had more than his share of stress the past year. Losing a number of loved ones, taking over his late father's ministry, and coming out and being okay with his sexuality could have been enough to drive him over the edge. Instead, all that intense activity created something else: a whole new musical expression called Brian Slade.

*Dawn o' the Unicorn* is most likely the project Ton3x dreamed about for years (or had hidden for years). Although most of his prior work has pushed the limits of contemporary gospel, it still had that smiley, hopeful, "God gon' make it all right" feel to it. *Unicorn* has allowed him to musically express anger, love, hope and yes, his hair, in ways he's never been able to before. Beginning with the highly dramatic "Unicorn," Brian Slade leads us through his intended theme: Creative types, such as vocalists, dancers, makeup artists, stylists and hairdressers are beautiful, unique and misunderstood creatures. And apparently extremely *fierce*.

"Secret Admirer" is an incredibly intense visitation to '80s new wave/electro-funk with a sprinkle of hip-hop swag. In the track Slade taunts his haters with "Nothin' lookin' like me / nothin' soundin' like me / no one dressin' like me." This is true. Musically, even Prince would be green with envy. While Prince has resorted to imitating his past self (and not doing a very good job of it) with a Jehovah's Witness sensibility, Slade has taken what the Purple One started 30 years ago and did what Prince hasn't been able to do since: Make it current. Now the look: Presumably, Ton3x borrowed the name "Brian Slade" from *Velvet Goldmine*, a 1998 British/American film based on David Bowie's "Ziggy Stardust" glam rock character. In the film, Slade is also gay. On the promo material, Ton3x's Slade dons a black leather jacket accessorized with rings, bracelets and other assorted bling, with a Joan Jett hairdo. *Fierce.*

Most notable about "Secret Admirer" is the parallel to another mega-gospel artist, now an ex-gay, who's been very vocal regarding Ton3x coming out. To him, Slade sings, "I already know you're my secret admirer / privately you want to be me, yeah / I already know you're my secret admirer / publicly you want to hate me, yeah." But the best part is when Slade dares, "try this on for size," then busts a crazy, high octave vocal run. Fierce, yet again.

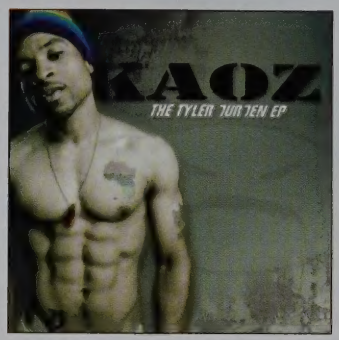
Other *Unicorn* highlights include the dance track "Justify My Love," which further solidifies Slade's independence, originality and fabulosity. "Glamour," mainly a funkified rap song starring Ton3x's rap persona, T. Bizzy, features three-part falsetto harmonies that would make Barry and Robin Gibb envious. The 10-minute jam "Get Over You" fuses the patented Sound of Philadelphia with modern-day ballroom flair, cat calls and all.

Although this project could be seen as Ton3x's coming out party, it falls short of being a same-gender-loving outing. *Unicorn* could have been the first CD by a major out recording artist to include an SGL love song. "Sunset," the CD's ethereal closing slow jam, comes close. In it, Slade and his boo are driving along Pacific Coast Highway, love in full bloom catching the last orange rays of the day. He goes back and forth from speaking to the listener to his significant other, so when he sings the line, "and he's wearing your favorite cologne," we're not entirely sure how that fits into his sexy ride.

Still, *Unicorn* is a top-notch project no matter what the orientation.—*MC*

*Preview it at www.myspace.com/brianslade.*

## KAOZ *The Tyler Durden EP / The Tyler Durden Mixtape*




If you like classic hip-hop, you'll be all over *The Tyler Durden EP/Mixtape*, the new releases by spoken word artist—but "rapper first"—Kaoz. By day, Kevin "Kaoz" Moore manages Minneapolis HIV education programs; his rap is very much an extension of that. Just as he gives youth the life skills they need to survive, his music also feeds souls and minds, a task he's more than willing to take on.

Kaoz has an obvious love for hip-hop, but first and foremost he loves his community. As Kevin Moore, he created Silence Equals Suicide, a showcase of spoken word artists performing original HIV/AIDS-themed works. He also received the National AIDS Education Services for Minorities (NAESM) Award of Excellence in Youth Leadership in 2007.

*The Tyler Durden EP* gets its name from the Brad Pitt character in the film *Fight Club*. The film's "Tyler" went way against the grain and wasn't afraid to stand up for what he believed in—no matter how intense, absurd or disturbing. Kaoz is just as fearless in his music and his role as out hip-hop artist.

*Tyler Durden* is an extremely listenable CD which will please true hip-hop fans. The mellow acoustic beats are as cleverly crafted as the lyrics; they're a sharp contrast from the raucous, grimy beats we hear in today's mainstream rap. Kaoz spits like a pro—and he is. He has a knack for telling stories with his rhymes, painting vivid pictures and exploring new ideas. At first listen, rap historians might think they're listening to the legendary CL Smooth, but after a few covert lines like "assign a point guard / drive it to the basket / but you dribble like warm fudge / I'm about to pack it," one might think again.

The EP opens with "Thieves in the Temple," a track describing what happens when people who think it's their job to service anything that moves wake up to find they have nothing. "White Girl" appears to be a tale reliving the ups and downs of interracial love. Digging deeper into lines like "I inhaled her seed" and "I sold her to others only to steal her back," we find Kaoz disclosing a dark period from seven years ago. After becoming unemployed, a not-so-enlightened young Kevin Moore chose to sell cocaine. For six months he was hooked on his own product; it took almost two years to get clean. He admits that, like any addiction, it's a daily battle. He calls the song his anti-drug song, "straight from the horse."

Kaoz also waxes poetic, throwing some spoken word in the mix. "The Boy Next Door" tells the tale of two teenage boys weaving in and out of the complexities of being same-gender loving in the urban Midwest. One endures homophobic abuse while his closeted friend increases the distance, realizing too late that a splash of courage and true friendship may have prevented his friend's suicide. The moving piece serves as Kaoz's tribute/apology to the gay kids that caught hell in high school while his own perceived masculinity kept him under the radar.

Kaoz can get deep but he's also got a sense of humor, which can be heard on "I Loved Loosey," a warning to bottomless bottoms: "Feels like I dived into the deep end of a pool / life jacket no where to be found / and no help." On "AntiOut," which is on the EP's companion mixtape, Kaoz pokes fun at rappers on the down low.

Whether he's community activist or MC, make no mistake, Kevin "Kaoz" Moore knows what he's doing and more importantly what he's here to do: Make a difference and make great music.—*MC*

*Preview it at www.kaozonline.com and www.reverbnation.com/kevinkaozmoore.*

# MAKE IT REIGN

Words/Dede Newby
Photo/Exclusively by Thai

When compared to most female hip-hop artists today, Ace Reign does not fit the typical image. With her long, black dreadlocks, white T-shirt, baggy jeans and white Nike Air Forces, it seems sex is not what she is interested in selling. Ace feels strongly that her musical talent speaks for itself. Her fans and admirers agree, and Ace's first release, *When It Reigns It Pours, Volume 1*, is already attracting notice from music industry professionals.

Ace, born April Winston in Washington, D.C., has been writing poetry as long as she can remember. "I used to write a lot of love poems," she says, "but after listening to such artists as Queen Latifah, MC Lyte and Trina, I decided to try rapping my poems." After studying Queen Latifah's hit, "U.N.I.T.Y.," and the vocals of MC Lyte, Ace stepped up her game and created her first song at age 12, titled "Raw." Ace's face lights up as she talks about the birth of her first original piece. "I still remember all the words," she says with a smile.

*When It Reigns It Pours, Volume 1* provides a little of everything for listeners—from R&B to rock, a touch of classical and a splash of house, polished by traditional hip-hop throughout. The best way to describe her blend of music is "an old school sound with a new school swagger," Ace says. "I think my music will appeal to the masses. There is something in it for everyone."

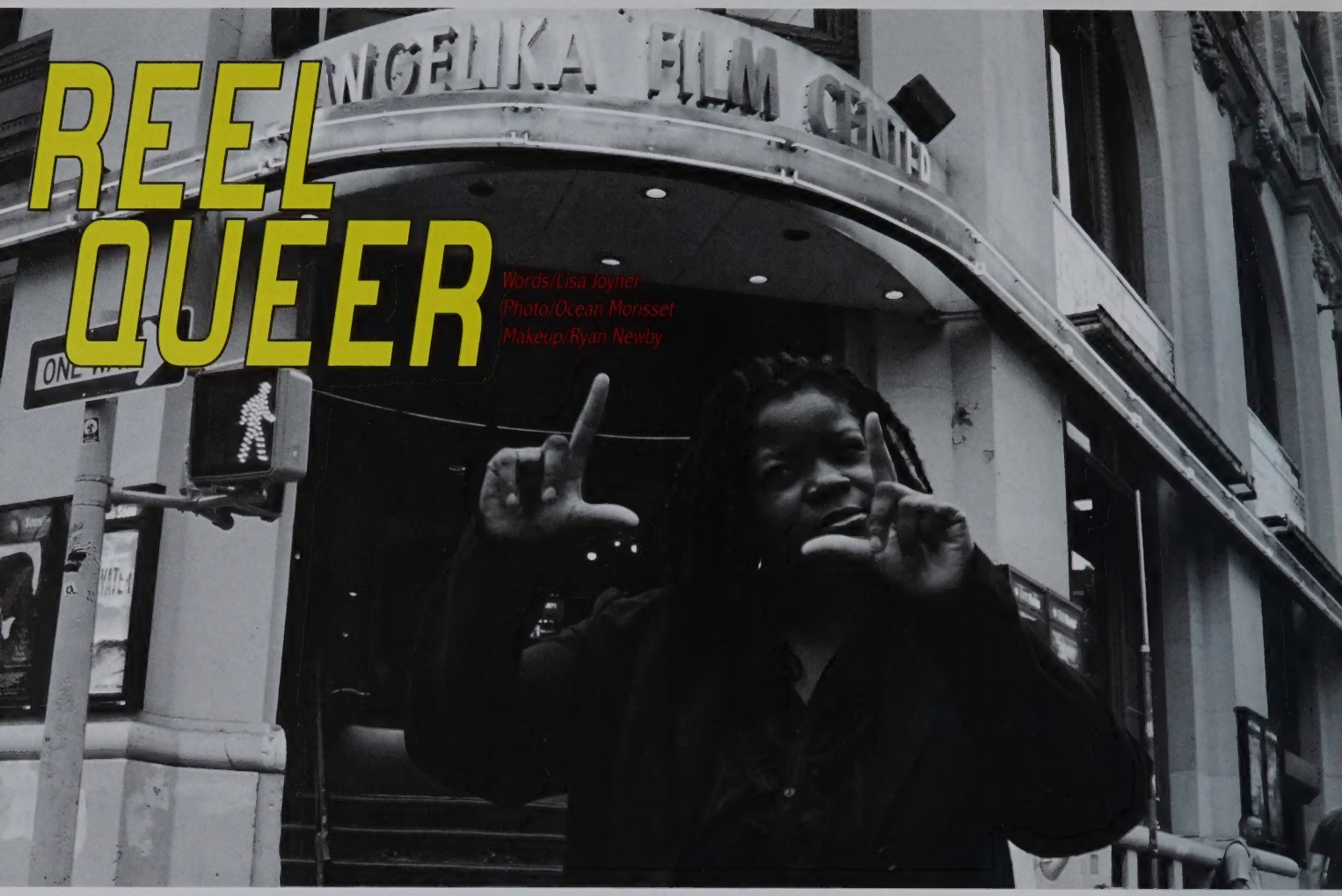
As a lyricist, she is not afraid to tackle sensitive topics in her music. For instance, "Beyond the Surface" addresses the judgmental views of people in society. "We all are made in God's image," Ace says, "but we are so judgmental toward each other, [to the point of] sometimes not really seeing the real blessings that are right in front of us." Yet, according to Ace, her music is something "you can bounce and pop bottles to or just relax."

Eighteen-year-old Kne'Elle Scott agrees with Ace's sentiments. She recently had the privilege of seeing Ace perform at Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center at South Carolina Black Pride's 2010 Community Expo. "I really like her music," Scott says. "When I first heard it, it caught my attention—the beats and her lyrics. If she comes out with another CD, I would buy it." Sheila Clifton from Rockhill, S.C. adds, "Her music is a new way to say it's time for something new. Her music is different, but understandable."

Copywrite, a well-respected underground hip-hop artist, recently praised Ace's craft. "For a female artist, Ace Reign is a great lyricist. When I first heard her, I was blown away." Rob Stern, a world-renowned producer and audio engineer, agrees: "Her voice is golden and she writes amazing lyrics," he says. Ace, Stern and electronic dance music producer Josh Gabriel co-produced "Candy Coated Whip" for the mixtape. Ace has also recently recorded "This Love" for House DJ Sander Kleinenberg's CD *5K*, to be released on Little Mountain Records on Sept. 13, 2010.

Kameelah Vose, CEO of Kamby Management Group, which represents Ace, says that she expects to see some great things from Ace. According to Vose, Ace "is genuine and does music for the love and not the financial award. She is a genius, [and] talented and gifted as a lyricist. She possesses a distinctive voice. Her music will appeal to both young and older hip hop fans."

*For more information about Ace Reign, visit sonicbids.com/acereign or facebook.com/pages/ace-reign/127485353937129. To purchase her CD, e-mail acereign@gmail.com.*



# REEL QUEER

Words/Lisa Joyner
Photo/Ocean Morisset
Makeup/Ryan Newby

*On a small red stool in the back of Lucky's, a burger joint not far from Greenwich Village, New York's infamous gay neighborhood, I awaited the arrival of Angel Brown-Ross, creator of the Queer Black Cinema (QBC) International Film Festival that takes place each year in Harlem. Brown-Ross, born and raised in Queens, N.Y., currently lives in Brooklyn. A filmmaker and film editor, she taught music and video production for seven years, and is a member of New York Women in Film & Television. After thirty minutes in walks a thick, brown woman. She aims a guilty smile in my direction, apologizes and begins to run off train logistics that in my lifetime I will never understand. I suggest that she get herself settled, order some food, and begin. She does and we do.*

***SWERV: Did you get your film editing background from college?***

**Angel Brown-Ross:** I went to school for music. I was on that route of being, you know, this music professor. I went to Tanzania, East Africa, and prior to leaving my mom gave me a camera. She said, "I never gave you anything. I always gave to other kids more than you, so, here you go." I took it with me on the trip, started filming everything, and got hit with the bug.

I took some workshops at the Harlem Screenwriters Workshop. Then I studied under Michelle Materre and Sam Pollard, who taught [workshops] at Third World Newsreel. So, I didn't go the traditional route of becoming a filmmaker. I am, for the most part, self-taught. I worked my way up sets, from being a production assistant to [being] assistant director (AD). Then I wrote my first short, *Desperate for Love.*

I always liked films; I always went to film festivals. I saw there was a lack of black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) representation here in New York; I created a monthly series. Eventually that monthly series turned into an annual film festival.

***SWERV: That's how the QBC International Film Festival came about?***

**ABR:** Umm hmm. I kinda sorta ran out of films. I was like, "OK, what am I going to do with some of this footage?" It's a monthly series. It's kind of hard finding films; very challenging, but it's not impossible. So I said, "If I start a film festival, the films that I collect for the film festival I can use for the monthly film series throughout the year." ...I also did college tours, especially women's events. We have a show called Faces of Black Women where we honor pioneer black lesbian filmmakers. The idea was to show some lesbian films but to also show emerging lesbian films, bring the pioneer filmmaker in, have a Q&A, and show them our appreciation. Last year we began giving out an award.

***SWERV: Is this done during the film festival?***

**ABR:** This is a separate event that happens in March during Women's Month. It did not happen this year. This is the first time in four years that it did not happen, due to budget cuts.

QBC International Film Festival is

not my livelihood. That's something that I do on the side, though it takes up a lot of my time. My livelihood is editing, shooting, directing, producing, and graphic designing. If I don't do that, I don't bring any money in to pay my bills and live. [But QBC] is my passion.

***SWERV: Do you find there to be such a shortage of films that you feel it necessary to accept every film submitted to the festival?***
**ABR:** Oh, my God. Thank you so much for asking this question. Absolutely not! I am a curator. There is a difference, and this is no disrespect to non-film festivals, i.e. Prides or anything like that. The whole process is different. I have submission forms. I'm looking for quality stuff.

In order for me to play with the big boys/girls, you have to come up with some quality stuff. You can't say, "Why aren't you showing more people of color films?" You can't say, "Here are some films," and then the films are crappy, the sound is not good, and the quality of production is not good. You can't say that to a Sundance. You can't say that to Outfest, Urban Festival, ABFF [American Black Film Festival]. Regardless if it's gay or straight, you can't say that when you talk of quality of substance. So with this festival, I am trying to get people to step it up.

***SWERV: I saw that last year you showed Tina Mabry's* Mississippi Damned*, and Faith Trimmel's* Family*. I actually interviewed them both. Do you know which films will show at the festival this year?***
**ABR:** Well, we just finished our call for submissions and we are going through films [now]. We are still looking for more films. We have a section in festival called First Works. The First Works don't necessarily have to be as good as *Mississippi Damned*. You've seen that film?

***SWERV: Yes. Excellent movie!***
**ABR:** The film doesn't have to be 100% excellent. It's [got to be] that promising filmmaker who makes you say, "Wow, this is one to look at." It is someone who is really going to make a mark on the industry though they are not there yet.

***SWERV: What are the clues?***
**ABR:** It's kind of what Michael Jackson said, "You just have to feel it." For example, one of the filmmakers who submitted their film, I saw their process. They actually did a short and chose to do it all over again. That says a lot—for you to complete a short already, and then to start all over and do it again? That shows me that you are very passionate, want to get this right and be taken seriously. You are serious about your craft.

***SWERV: Does it mean that they're good, though?***
**ABR:** No, but for the most part [the film] is good. It's not a *Mississippi Damned* or a *Brooklyn's Bridge to Jordan*...but it's up there.

***SWERV: Is the QBC International Film Festival still connected to a music festival? I previously saw it listed as the QBC International Film and Music Festival.***
**ABR:** The first year I did the film festival it was "and music," because remember, I have a very strong background in music. When I got a sponsor, the first time they actually gave me money for the festival, they suggested I should take the music part out and develop the festival first, then add the music later. I thought that was smart, because the way I envision the film festival was to have music concerts at this festival as well as films.

Last year I took a lot of steps backward. I used to have a monthly film series; I stopped that so that I could focus on the film festival. ...Focus on one thing, make it really good, big and nice and just add as it grows.

One thing I didn't want to change was "International." [Last year] I showed work from [filmmaker] Campbell. [You can learn more about Campbell at www.blackmanvision.com.] This year I will show *Society*, which is a South African Lesbian series that is very successful in South Africa. They combined two episodes into one so that they can travel the film festival with it. I am opening the film festival with *A Changing of Guards*, which is a film out of the Bahamas.

***SWERV: Let's talk about your film magazine.***
**ABR:** It's called *Cinematiq*. I changed the "c" to a "q," because I wanted to represent queer.

It basically gives you a distinct and unique perspective of black LGBT cinema. In this magazine you will see articles on *Mississippi Damned* or, let's say, *Precious*. The lesbian couple in *Precious*, you know, those characters were pretty much washed over. You didn't hear much about them in the mainstream media, which bothered me, because they played such a pivotal role in the process of her moving forward with her life. No one really talked about that. I'm trying to create a magazine where we can talk about this. I want to talk about *Death at a Funeral* where the father was gay. How did the family react to that? On top of these different film reviews [there are] also how-to articles.

***SWERV: Are you single, Angel?***
**ABR:** (laughter)

***SWERV: That's always my last question.***
**ABR:** I don't know if I want to answer that question...

*The QBC International Film Festival takes place Oct. 14-17, 2010 at the National Black Theatre in Harlem, N.Y. Last year more than fifteen movies (1,500 tickets sold) were shown over the course of four days.*

*To learn more, visit www.queerblackcinema.org, or www.cinematiqmag.com.*

# THE WAY I SEE IT

Words/Rob Smith

The scene played out in slow motion. As I looked up at the server of one of New York City's never-ending supply of expensive restaurants that seems to specialize in mediocre food, I saw his expression: a mixture of disdain and sadness, his eyebrows lifted up in slight dismay. "I'm sorry sir, but your card has been declined," he said. Mortified, I felt the chill of deep embarrassment spread up my legs and into the pit of my stomach.

I looked guiltily at the members of my sports team that had invited me out—the ones with duplexes on the Upper West Side and homes in Long Island. The ones with money. I should've known better when my restaurant suggestion of Chipotle was scoffed at. Perhaps I should've declined those two glasses from the bottle of wine that was split evenly among the table. Alas, I didn't, sure that my Capital One Visa would be there to save me. Emergency, indeed.

A few apologies and a quick trip to the ATM later, I said my good-byes as they headed to a popular bar in the midtown gayborhood, undoubtedly to rack up a bar tab that was roughly the size of my weekly grocery budget. As I walked down 8th Avenue past the succession of clothing stores I began to look at my gay brethren walking up the street in my direction. I looked intently at their Prada sunglasses, their $75 haircuts, their Universal Gear shopping bags and their Puma shoes. I wondered, not for the first time, where in the *hell* all their money was coming from. Trust funds? Great stocks? Side jobs as professional escorts? Or were they really just fabulous super-gays with amazing jobs and boatloads of disposable income?

For some reason, talking about money has become the ultimate taboo. Gays talk freely and openly about giving BJs, but watch your back if you ask about their IRA. Why is that? Have we become so inundated with the myth of the super-wealthy, fabulous gay that we feel an immense pressure to live up to it? After all, studies have shown time and time again that gay men and women earn less, on average, than their straight counterparts.

After two and a half years of living hand to mouth in one of the most expensive cities in the world, it was enough to make me feel despondent. I'm an H&M boy in a D&G world, and chasing dreams of writing, speaking and making a difference doesn't buy a full-floor penthouse duplex on 16th Street. I began to wonder about the motivation for life, the motivation to work, and some of the joy we sacrifice in order to have "nice things." The point had been made a few months earlier during a conversation over (a $30) brunch with a friend of a friend. "Look," he said, deep brown eyes fixed intensely on mine, "I like having nice stuff. I like going to brunch. I like having a cute apartment. So what if I hate my job? At least I'm making money."

But is making money really what it's all about? Is the be-all and end-all of gay culture simply to strive toward the upper middle-class comforts that allow us to be as fashionable as the characters on *Noah's Arc*, have a penthouse apartment like Carrie Bradshaw, or to take the trips on the Atlantis cruises and Black Pride excursions advertised in the pages of magazines like *Out*, *Instinct* and, yes, *SWERV*? I'm not so sure anymore, especially not as I prepare to leave a cushy advertising job with the potential for a six-figure income to pursue a different career simply because it makes me feel purposeful and fulfilled.

When I got the idea for this column, I was afraid to write it. I was afraid to break the middle-class illusion that my doorman apartment (rented), sporadically cute clothes (H&M, Gap and vintage) and nights out to dinner (courtesy of Groupon.com) had helped me create for so long. An illusion, perhaps, that was never bought by anyone as well as it was aggressively sold by me. Perhaps as gay men we're all Lords of Illusion, projecting images of money, power, wealth and style so that nobody looks close enough to realize that it's all a game.

When I look back at all that I've thought about and gone through in the past few months since the incident at the restaurant, I think maybe that was why I finally decided to forfeit. I don't really have expensive clothes, or go out to expensive dinners, but that's OK. I cook at home, get great deals on clothes, and am an absolute beast at finding a good happy hour deal in New York City. I'm also more content in my life and work than I have been in years.

Even though I'm young and broke, I feel *fabulous*.

*Rob Smith is a freelance writer located in New York City. He's written for* USA Today, The Huffington Post, *and* AfterElton.com. *He is currently working on a memoir detailing his tenure as a gay soldier in the U.S. Army. Contact him at robsmithvet@gmail.com and twitter.com/robsmithonline.*

## FEMME MEN continued from page 21

the SGL community see and characterize each other. "On the one hand many folks—even gays and femmes—see femme as weak and negative, and then we often celebrate hyper black femininity and divas," he says.

Clarence concurs. "The more masculine you are the more valued and desired you are and the more femme you are the less valuable and desirable you are—socially and romantically," he says. "In that, there is some internalized homophobia, some sheer discomfort with self, some lack of progress being made by a community of black men who could gain from each other but don't." Clarence rightfully perceives that this construct that many black men have built is sealed "with ignorance and keeps other black men out and everyone locked in a bad place."

While Tyrus feels similarly, he also is witness to what he sees as a change—if only superficially—occurring in traditional gender biases among black queer men. "Until recently, the black queer community ranked the femme man similarly to a transgendered individual, who is often at the bottom of the queer totem pole," he remarks. "Now I see a desire and lust for feminine men. I reside in Harlem and there is a new gay renaissance occurring. You notice the 'straight men' checking out the boys pumping down 125th Street and looking at them long and hard. A femme man, when partnered with a man who considers himself masculine, I think he makes them feel more dominant. A masculine man doesn't long for another masculine man; he longs for the softer, daintier individual."

While I am not sure about what Tyrus is suggesting—masculine men and their quest for femininity as a complement—what I do recognize is how powerful the male/female dynamic is and how people, through nature or nurture, reach for it. However, we are born of a physical male and a physical female, and so we possess the spiritual, emotional and sometimes physical resources of each. This powerful if confounding fact is often ignored or obscured in blaring, misleading and harmful social constructs that tell us about being alive, but more about how to act. And so while so-called opposites attract and may be a *preference* for some, it is not exclusive nor reveals our complex nature if relieved of social expectation and regulation.

Femme men are attracted to me and I to them. A few of them have become good friends, and others have become lovers. One particular femme man I dated was exceptionally in tune with what he felt, wanted and desired. I have wondered if his effeminacy—his delicate gestures, smart dressing and emotional maturity—made me feel like a "man." Man, in my case, is defined as less delicate and in utter denial of my feelings. The main impression he left me with required me to more carefully consider my own wants and desires, be forthcoming with my thoughts, and perhaps dress a bit better.

"I am open to the possibilities," says Clarence when asked if he would date other femme men. "I am a same-gender-loving man. I understand what gender is, loving is and what manhood is. None of those things are contingent on the construct of masculinity or effeminacy."

"I love femme guys because I love the femme qualities in men," says Charly. "I want to touch, protect, and kiss, sex, explore and protect them, just as I wish to have someone do to my feminine side."

Kenyon's trajectory from femme to perhaps *less* femme is not only a matter of the beholder, but also reflected in his preferences.

"I have mostly also been a top in my sexual life and have tended to attract butch bottoms. But in my older age I am less femme-identified, and I am approached, and, well, fuck/date more femme men," he said. "But mostly now the men I tend to date are more like me, more a balance of the two."

"I think I have learned, though, to really respect, admire and be attracted to both feminine and masculine energy for the different but important things they bring to the table," Travis said, adding that "I think queer men of color are quite capable of making that a quality we all share."

"I stopped trying to trap some homothug hoping he would validate me and being ashamed of putting my hands on my hips," he said.

What strikes me most in my reflection on femme men, particularly Tony and Michael, is that they were men in the best sense of the word. In my evolution of what I hope to be—open, free, beautiful—my journey has been aided and nurtured by men who were femme, or at the very least, not afraid to be feminine. Unlike a great deal of the self-proclaimed *men's* men in my life, femme men have offered me the types of experiences that Charly describes as "sensual, emotional, manicured, pretty, light, joyous, colorful, alluring," and this I love and appreciate dearly. While traditionally masculine men have their gifts, femme men point to what's possible. Their energy tends to unlock doors, not shut them. Nigel rightfully calls femme men the vanguard. "Like trannies, they can't hide or 'shift' out of form. They are our soldiers," he says. Uncelebrated warriors. Until now.

## THINK LOCAL continued from page 19

in 2010. These next state leaders will have numerous opportunities to affect our lives, including that once-in-a-decade chance — depending on which party is in control — to be a part of redrawing the Congressional districts after the 2010 census. This redistricting will impact all of us for at least the next decade, but given the history of incumbency, undoubtedly for far beyond. And these leaders will have the chance to effect change through ordinances and legislation ranging from legalization of medical marijuana to passing local non-discrimination ordinances protecting transgender community members and, in some states, laws that will approve or ban same-sex relationship recognition and/or adoption. Let's not forget Arizona law SB1070 and the many copycat laws that are pending. The acts of local and state legislative bodies have enormous implications for how we live our daily lives. From district buildings to state houses to the nation's capital, we need legislators and policymakers who understand our needs and who will act accordingly.

That's why voting this November will be one of the single most important actions each of us can take. The equality and security we seek begins at home. We aren't the only ones voting. Our family members and prayer partners, our neighbors and colleagues, our friends and our acquaintances are all voting, too. All of us need to work locally and nationally through volunteering and voting, going door to door, and phone-banking, to ensure that there is a progressive leadership in office that is not afraid to act on behalf of our communities at home, in our state houses and city halls, and on Capitol Hill.

All across this country African-American and other ethnicities of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are facing the daily challenges of caring for their families under the heavy cloak of ongoing stigma and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender expression and racial identity. Let's put our collective shoulders to the wheel during this election cycle and work for a progressive leadership at the local, state and national levels that will legislate to ensure justice, and guarantee equality for us all.

*Rev. Darlene Nipper is the deputy executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and an ordained interfaith minister.*

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agenda. I can't imagine why I would start now. It is to me a movement spoon-fed to us that was picked up by some "capital G" gays with "normalcy" as its goal—again. To date [same-sex marriage] is not something that has been particularly important to me. That said, do I think we all deserve equal protection under the law? Yes. Am I insanely attached to ritual? Yes. Do I possibly believe in everlasting love? Yes. And do I love throwing a good party more than almost anything else? Yes. Plus, I like to get dressed. So don't get me wrong. I'm happy to get invited to a good wedding. I'd maybe one day get coaxed into having one. But right now, I'm interested in a movement with actual equality as its goal: access to a living wage, the preservation of public space, the decentralization of wealth, and the decriminalization of our youth. Otherwise, it would seem to me that we'd be signing on as complicit participants in a system still very much configured for our actual demise, not well-being. Also, let's face it: I'm busy and tired, and Daddy's getting a lil' old; if I'm gonna get it up to fight I have to pick my battles. The fight for marriage equality does not seem to me to be the best use of my skills/time/effort, but ya know, it takes all kinds.

***SWERV: What's your secret to maintaining such a beautiful, long-standing relationship?***

**TR:** Commitment. Bob committed to our daughter first. She told her that no matter what happened in our relationship she knew she would be a part of Tashawn's life forever. It is hard work. We have committed to the process of being together in the world. She is one of the best people I have ever met. I am in awe of her creativity and purpose. She is really good-looking, a great cook and an amazing dancer. She loves House music. She has spent the last few years being the chair of the board for Fierce (www.fiercenyc.org) in addition to all of the other work she does. I really love her; I really like her. I am willing to do what it takes to be with her. Not always easy, but always worth it.

***SWERV: As a BBW [big beautiful woman], how does all the media and cultural emphasis on size ring for you, and have you found this conversation creeping into lesbian circles?***

**TR:** I have never looked to the media as a yardstick for who I should be in the world,

Photo/Bernie DeChant

or what I should look like. [That's a] spirit death for black women. For the majority of the time we have been on the globe and there has been a "media," they have gotten us wrong and have never fully appreciated or celebrated our gifts and diversity. Now that there have been some wonderful publications, TV shows, etc. presented by people of color, I still find the view too narrow.

I think the biggest concern for me [about] being big is health. I have always been big. I love my body. I also love being alive. Good health and self-love through good health is important. This does not mean I will ever be a skinny person, but that is a goal for me. Over the last few years I have lost weight every year, going down three pants sizes 'til my daughter yelled at me to buy new pants because my clothes were too big and I looked stupid. So, again, my goal is not to be skinny, but to strive for good health—because I love my life and when I die, I want it to be because I am very old. I have always felt beautiful and I do not enjoy compliments about weight loss. I know folks are obsessed over a certain kind of beauty. I saw the beautifully sculpted brother on the cover of one of your magazines. That is how it is and for me, as I said before, I feel good inside the body I have.

As for lesbians, I think the same issue affects our community. I do find more support for women of size in our community. I also think that is because there are a lot of activists in our community and a strong willingness to fight against discrimination. Now that lesbians have taken strong roles in the media, it is fun to see some little bits of diversity seeping into the mainstream, although I would like more, more, more.

***SWERV: You've worked with some pretty incredible musicians as a producer, including Chocolate Genius, Sweet Honey in the Rock, and most recently with Lizz Wright on* Fellowship*—always to high acclaim. Has it gotten any better for women producers and why do you think there are so few?***

**TR:** Why do I think there are so few? Because women can't do it? (Laughter) I am being sarcastic. Come on now, it takes a movement to change the imbalance of systems that have worked so hard to keep the field from being diverse. I think men dominate the producer end of the music business. I have inched my way in. Working with Lizz on *Fellowship* is the first time I have produced on a *major* label. It drops Sept. 28, 2010.

***SWERV: What's next for your band, Big Lovely; your label; and Toshi Reagon?***

**TR:** I am in the studio with my drummer, Robert Burke [of the group The Duke and the King]. We are producing my next studio record. I am also mixing the Big Lovely live record. I am looking forward to Lizz's release. I am doing a show with Lizz and my mom next spring at the Schomburg [Center for Research in Harlem, N.Y.] celebrating the music of Odetta. Work, work, work, all the time. Music, music, music, all the time.

Advancing an Agenda for Research, Policy, and Service in the Interest of Black Gay Men

BGRG

The Black Gay Research Group

# The Black Gay Research Group responds to the National HIV/AIDS Strategy

The Black Gay Research Group (BGRG) welcomes the release of the first National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States. We are heartened by the efforts on the part of President Barack Obama and his administration to allocate resources toward fighting the AIDS epidemic in the United States. Of particular note is the vision for the National HIV/AIDS strategy which rightly focuses on prevention of new HIV infections and ensuring access to "high quality, life-extending care, free from stigma and discrimination" for those who do become infected. As a group of researchers, advocates, and community service providers, we are pleased that the comprehensive plan recognizes the importance of sound research and community based approaches to reducing HIV infections. Most importantly, we applaud language in the plan that indicates that communities most disproportionately affected by the epidemic will have access to appropriate resources to combat it. Black men who have sex with men (MSM) communities are most disproportionately affected by the domestic epidemic, and we believe that this report augurs well for ensuring that this community is sufficiently supported in its fight against HIV.

Yet, while we are pleased with the report overall, there are some core issues remaining that we strongly believe must be addressed as the nation moves toward implementing this plan. The report rightly mentions that fighting HIV among Blacks is not mutually excusive with fighting HIV among gay and bisexual men; however, we offer caution at the report's presentation of these categories of lived experience as separate. For Black MSM, race, culture, and sexuality are inextricably intertwined and create a psychosocial experience that is unique and not an additive result of being Black and being gay or bisexual. Therefore, to reduce the HIV related health disparities in this community, there must be a focus on addressing structural factors involving racism, homophobia, and other macro and micro level impediments that permeate the lives of Black MSM in addition to specific interventions that are culturally grounded and based on rigorous scientific, culturally specific, methodological approaches. Reducing HIV infections in gay and bisexual men as well as in Black communities cannot occur without addressing the specificity of the experiences of Black MSM and creating interventions that meet their particular needs. Furthermore, the National HIV/AIDS strategy, particularly with respect to Black MSM, cannot be successfully implemented without the allocation of additional Federal funds

The National HIV/AIDS Strategy is a much-needed step in the right direction toward addressing the epidemic in the United States. We offer the following recommendations that we believe are key to successful implementation of the plan:

- Recognize that the needs of Black MSM as a group should be addressed specifically and that it should not
  be assumed that this group will be sufficiently reached through efforts targeted to the Black community or
  gay and bisexual men.
- Utilize researchers who are reflective of the communities disproportionately affected by the epidemic.
- Identify, train, and develop researchers and community leaders who are reflective of the communities disproportionately affected by the epidemic.

Provide additional funds from the Federal Government in order to implement the plan. We look forward to collaborating with all the stakeholders involved to ensure that the implementation plan for the National HIV/AIDS Strategy is successful.

*The BGRG was founded in 2001 in an effort to strengthen, empower and provide a network for Black gay researchers and community workers/activists. Its mission is to advance an agenda of research, policy and service in the interests of Black gay men. More information about the BGRG can be found at www.bgrg-international.org.*

**September 12-15, 2010**
**United States Conference on AIDS (USCA)**
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The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) presents the largest AIDS-related gathering in the U.S., bringing together over 3,000 workers from all fronts of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
www.2010USCA.org

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www.blacklesbiansunited.org

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www.ebonypyramidonline.com

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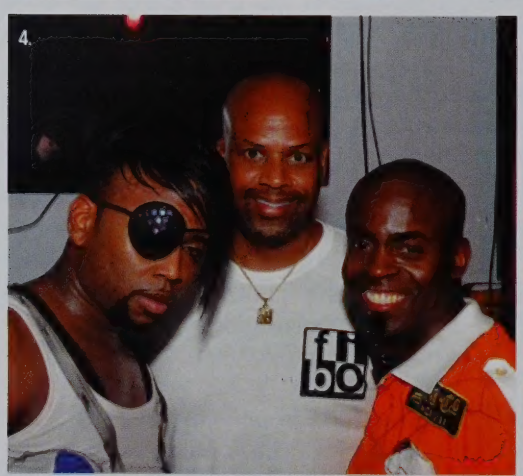
This year's honorees include producer/director Lee Daniels and Grammy Award-winning artist Pink.
www.hrcnationaldinner.org

# ON THE SCENE



**Washington, D.C.'s White Attire Affair HIV awareness fundraiser and Fire Island BlackOut beach party.**

*1. Host Rayceen Pendarvis and friend. 2. White Attire Affair guests. 3. SWERV co-publisher Jamil Fletcher with stylist Yardé Noir and friends. 4. Recording artist Ton3x, FIBO staff member James, GLO Network's Maurice Jamal. 5. FIBO guests arriving at the beach. 6. FIBO event.*

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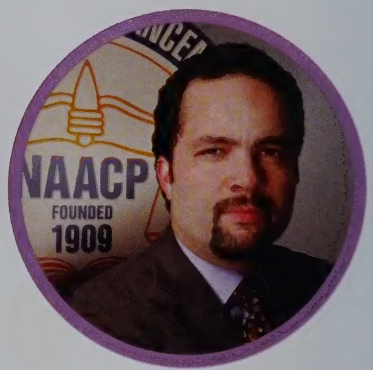


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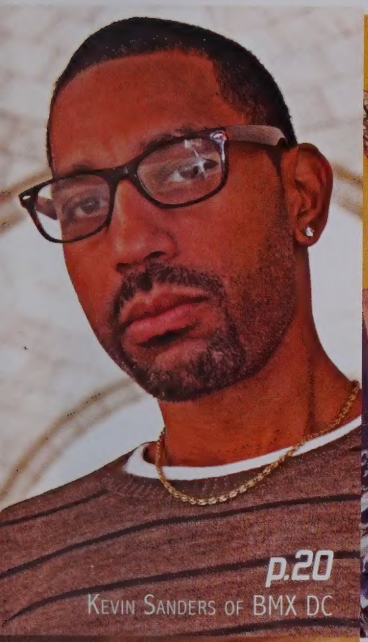

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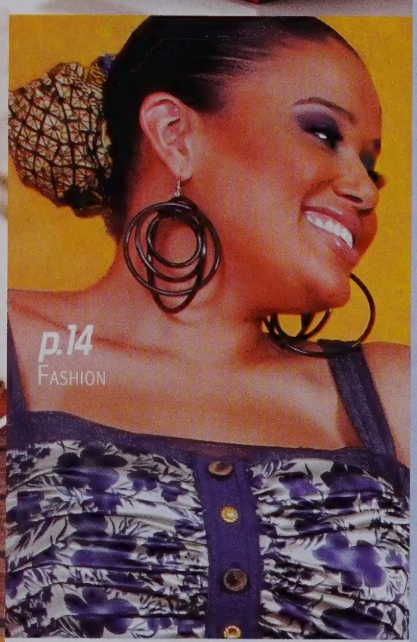

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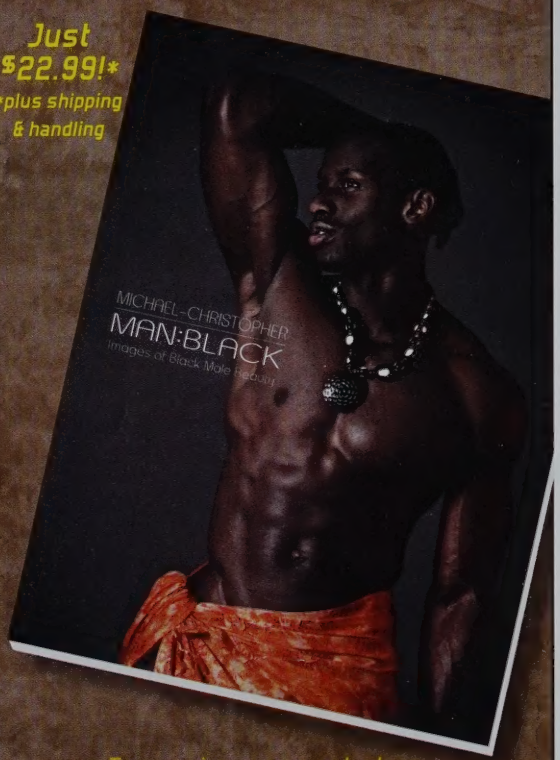

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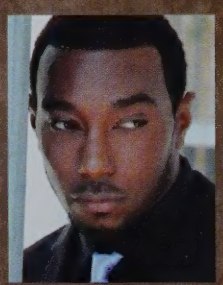
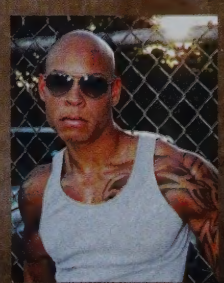
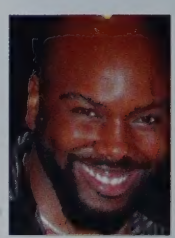



MC BOOKS

# contributors

Whether he is styling a celebrity for a high fashion editorial or covering the runway shows for various media outlets, Troy Artis is becoming one of the industry's authorities on all things stylish. This style maven has interviewed many high-profile names in fashion and entertainment such as Nigel Barker, Kelly Rowland, Tim Gunn, Beverly Johnson, André Leon Tally, Sherri Shepherd, Betsey Johnson and Robert Verdi among others.

Clarence* J. Fluker is a freelance writer and blogger based in Washington, D.C. His work has appeared in a variety of print and online publications including *ARISE* magazine, where he served as Next Generation editor. His essay, "A Nation Divided," appears in the acclaimed anthology *Spirited* from RedBone Press. Fluker earned his undergraduate degree from Morgan State University and his graduate degree from American University.



L. Michael Gipson is an Oakland-based cultural critic, community health planner and award-winning youth advocate. His sociopolitical essays have been published in two anthologies, including *Poverty & Race in America: The Emerging Agendas* (Chester Hartman, ed.). As a cultural critic and music journalist, Gipson's work has appeared in *Clik*, *Pulse*, *Arise*, *Pride*, *Amplify*, *Urban Dialect*, *Port of Harlem* and *Creative Loafing ATL*. He is editor and columnist at www.SoulTracks.com and heard weekly as "Cornfed" on *The Dave Brown Radio Show*.

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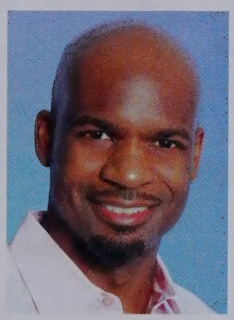

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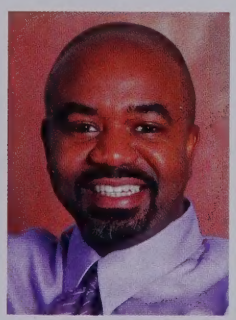

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# From the Editor

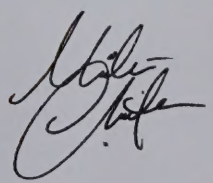
I was 14 years old in 1981, attending Benjamin Franklin Junior High and, although I was on the honor roll, I was not very knowledgeable about a virus known then as a gay-related "cancer." When I came out into the LGBT community five years later, I was more educated about the disease but still hadn't been exposed to safe-sex messages. Back then, you asked a few questions, looked for lesions and took your chances. Thankfully, it didn't take too long for me to get the word that a simple birth control method could save thousands of lives, including my own. Once armed with this information, it was all I needed to protect myself.

Unfortunately for many, this simple fix came too late, while others chose to ignore it knowing full well the risk. More often I would run into beautiful young black men who seemed to age fifty years overnight. Some transformed so drastically they were unrecognizable. Tragically, some of them were friends who eventually passed on, and one, most devastatingly, was a former partner.

Currently, HIV continues to spread like wildfire in the black community. Infection rates continue to rise for men who have sex with men, especially among the youth. After all these years, one can't help but wonder how such a small percentage of the population can be hit so hard with this disease. I posed the question "Why is the black community still contracting HIV?" to several community members in hopes of revealing the reason we are not loving ourselves enough to play it safe each and every time.

Also featured in this issue is a Washingtonian who decided it was time to pull himself, and others, out of the darkness to begin the process of healing and self-love. Artist Marshall Titus recently released a same-gender themed song and music video dealing with HIV, and prominent community members weigh in on where we are in the fight against HIV/AIDS and where we need to go.

In the early 2000s a friend passed on a job lead to me to illustrate safe-sex materials for black gay men and for years I made HIV prevention my career focus. December 1 is World AIDS Day. And while most can't devote their life's work to the fight against HIV/AIDS, there's always something one can do to support the cause and honor those who have lost the battle. You can participate in AIDS Walk; donate directly to local or national organizations and health service providers; educate the youth in your life on how the virus is contracted and how to protect themselves from it; and, most importantly, commit to protecting yourself.



# Why is the Black Community still contracting HIV?

Compiled by Michael-Christopher

*There is something very wrong in the black community and it's time we figure out what that is. For three decades the world, has been living with one of the most complex social phenomenons to date: the HIV virus. For some reason, black people have failed to avoid this highly preventable disease.*

*But it's much more than a sexually transmitted disease. It strikes more fear in hearts than syphilis, gonorrhea and chlamydia combined; it brings shame so strong it makes people go into hiding from friends and loved ones; and many people have said if they were to find they had it, they would take their own life before AIDS set in to claim it. So why, after thirty years, have black people just not gotten the wake-up call to have safer sex?*

*What seems to be a no-brainer to many seems to be a complex equation to others. Many others. Roughly half of black gay men are estimated to be HIV-positive. It's believed there are scores more who do not know their positive status. Heterosexual black women's numbers are climbing as well, and although it's not getting much press, it's likely heterosexual black men's numbers are too—they're just not getting tested (see the black women's plight).*

*During my time as an HIV-prevention campaign consultant I've observed some things that I believe factor into the overall problem. I've had the misfortune of working with agencies who missed the mark in their messaging because they knew nothing about the target population. I've worked on projects that spent thousands of dollars only to abandon the campaign without announcement or explanation. And now that HIV/AIDS is primarily a "black problem" (a 13 percent of the population problem), it's no longer a priority, therefore funding is cut.*

*It's not just the powers that be that are at fault. We have people who are in denial, who don't realize their mortality, those with economic restraints (condoms and lubricant are expensive!) and newly sexually active youth who just don't know.*

*To further explore this disturbing situation, I've called upon several prominent members of the community—a behavioral health specialist, a clergyman, a youth leader, a blogger and a director of a black men's organization—to answer the question: Why is the black community still contracting HIV?*

# Cleo Manago

Cleo Manago, behavioral health specialist, writer and public speaker, is CEO and founder of the Black Men's Xchange (BMX) and the AmASSI Centers for Wellness, Education and Culture.

As a firsthand eyewitness to the rise of America's black HIV/AIDS industry, starting in the mid-1980s, I am deeply affected by this topic. Almost thirty years ago, based on black AIDS programs I observed, I predicted that HIV would likely be in our communities for an unparalleled amount of time. I vividly remember, while in my early twenties, black brothers dying in droves. Legions of once vital—and soon terrified—young males were filling hospital beds, hospices and cemeteries. It was a virtual hell-o-cost. Many black communities were already stressed by the challenges of the day (e.g., police brutality, high unemployment, problematic media images, stigma for being black and a crack epidemic, among other social problems). African Americans had never in history directly dealt with issues related to same-gender-loving (SGL) or bisexual black men.

Alarmed, in 1986 I attempted to stem the HIV tide, beginning with a speech I gave at an HIV/AIDS conference held in San Francisco, Calif. I was invited to speak by the late black Puerto Rican AIDS treatment pioneer Dr. German Maisonette. This was my first time publicly speaking on the issue. My topic was "Effectively Bringing HIV Prevention to Diverse Black Communities." During my talk, I expressed that while it was important that gay-identified people continue to get proper resources, a more multidimensional approach—in terms of identity, education and outreach—was needed to attract diverse black people to AIDS-related services. I went on to mention that many black males at HIV sexual risk did not identify with or as gay. I strongly urged them to consider this when rolling out black prevention and care programs, so as not to alienate people needing prevention services. If not, many would continue to get infected, and there was a risk to black women.

I was heckled. Someone called me "homophobic" and a "race baiter." These remarks noticeably came from behind a banner that said "Black and White Men Together (BWMT)." BWMT was an organization founded in San Francisco by a white man for white men with a sexual fetish for black men. The largely white gay male audience, with a smattering of black men, all who were wrapped around white men, did not want to hear what I was saying. They had no interest in anything that wasn't gay-identity focused, or was black-focused, or was anything that included women.

As I left the podium, Dr. Maisonette saw the disappointment on my face. I sat next to him, and he said, "Cleo, they don't understand black communities. You may have to launch your recommended approach." In 1989 I established both the Black Men's Xchange (BMX) and the first African-American AIDS prevention institute in the state. I named it the "AmASSI Wellness and Cultural Center." AmASSI stands for the African-American Advocacy, Support-Services and Survival Institute.

For years, despite BMX and AmASSI's unique capacity to attract and serve diverse black men, we were treated like pariahs. Work that affirmed being black and related struggles, not solely focused on gay identity, was not valued. In 1994 we successfully developed and piloted an HIV-prevention strategy called Critical Thinking and Cultural Affirmation (CTCA); just recently, in 2010, it was recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a "promising" black community HIV intervention. In four more years it may be considered to fill America's gap in efficient, culturally responsive, African-American designed HIV prevention methodologies.

In 1986, BWMT was granted millions in federal resources by the CDC for their "National Task Force on AIDS Prevention (NTFAP)." NFTAP was the nation's first project funded to provide HIV-prevention services to gay-identified black men in the United States. However, some years later, due to the organization's mismanagement of funds and inability to reach black men, it was defunded and closed. BWMT members have continued nonetheless to recreate themselves to stay relevant in the HIV field, still attracting federal dollars and notoriety. And HIV infection rates are now worst for black men.

The black community still has HIV because America has never had an efficient and black culturally responsive HIV-prevention model, policy, campaign, leadership or agenda—in thirty years. Given that we live in a modern society, this may be difficult to believe. Yet we also have our first black president. Even President Obama has had to tip around African-American issues so as not to offend non-black people. The HIV/AIDS issue has suffered from a similar phenomenon among its self-selected and inefficient leadership.

Preventing HIV among African Americans, especially males (which protects women as well), requires specific and skilled focus on the mastery of risk-reducing behavior change, guiding people toward dignity, and vigilance toward valuing risky sex-related impulse control to protect themselves. This is exactly what CTCA does. Accountability, skilled leadership and culturally affirming strategies will make HIV a thing of the past.

# Rev. Kevin E. Taylor

Rev. Kevin E. Taylor, senior pastor of Unity Fellowship Church of New Brunswick, N.J., is an inspirational speaker, Internet life coach, former television producer and author of *Unclutter, Jaded, It's Time for Some Action*, and *Get Off Your Ass and Do Something.*

There is a very insidious reason why HIV is still infecting and impacting the black community at such alarming rates. The Black Church isn't doing its part.

I was raised from the age of 10 in the Baptist church. For as long as I have been aware of church, I have heard preachers preach about "wickedness." Whether it was alcohol or drugs, sex or other "bad" habits, we were told again and again to stay away from "wickedness" and not fall prey to its grip. The church used the word and the language that went along with it—"damnation," "hell-bound," "evil," "abomination"—with the "hands-off" spiritual hope that enough shame and Scripture would stop people from doing something. Then along came HIV. Even its introduction was that of a "gay men's disease"; the church had proof positive that "wickedness" had its repercussions and that they were right all along.

Church folks have used the language of "wickedness" to suggest that certain people of certain orientations are those who are in danger of getting infected. They are "wicked." The language that has been used to talk about sin and sinners has now almost exclusively become assertions hurled at gay men who are doing this and that and living a lifestyle of "wickedness" that is now getting its comeuppance and enduring God's wrath.

The truth, of course, is that it's not the sexual orientation of people that is the reason that people seroconvert. It is unprotected sex. Period. People who have unprotected sex are in danger of becoming HIV-positive and no one in the Black Church is willing to rescue our community by having that simple conversation. Sex is not wicked. But the church's indifference might be pretty close to wicked. God didn't make us as sexual beings only to damn us for something that was not of our own design. God did, however, make us thinking beings. We must have a conversation that speaks of choices and consequences—and the conversation must not arise from a damnable place. We must simply understand that you must take the best care of yourself while you are making the choices that you make, or those choices could have consequences beyond the moment of pleasure that you so treasure.

The Black Church has buried its collective head in the sand and left black gay men specifically, and the black community in general, in a place that intersects at misinformation and ambivalence. Why are we seeing HIV infection numbers increase again? And why aren't we having conversations, abundantly, about life in the one place where black people have always been given information: church? A deeper cultural reality is that many young gay black males are convinced that they are already damned and unloved by society, so they might as well have all the sex that they want. They have been told that their lives (and their "lifestyle") have no merit and so they make choices accordingly.

We don't need an "It Gets Better" campaign for our young brothers. We need a "You Are Better Than This" campaign that tells them that as much as they want to mimic the behavior they see on the Internet and in the porn flicks—often the only time they see two black men loving each other—they are better than the raw sexual moments they are participating in. Raw sex won't assuage the raw emotion of wanting to be loved.

The Black Church has left many to fend for self because discussions about sex and sexuality don't come from the pulpit; all things sexual are read as taboo by the Church. The Black Church, the epicenter of many black families, continues to do the entire community a disservice by not having a real conversation about education and abstinence for young people. These young people are willing to do the work to commit to protect and preserve their sexuality for marriage; the Black Church should also commit to protection for those who find themselves actively and actually exploring their sexuality. We must remind our young people (and our peers, for that matter) that they are worthy and worthwhile human beings who should get the chance to live their greatest lives without having to be concerned about adding another stigma to their journey.

HIV is still impacting black people because black preachers aren't speaking truth. Here's the truth: People—young *and* grown—if you are having sex, protect yourself! You are worth more than a one-night encounter that could change your life (and your status) forever. If you have to buy the condoms and have the uncomfortable talk with that young boy at your church, or on your job, or in your family, isn't it better that you have that talk than the one about how HIV isn't the end of your life?

Some pastor who is trying to rile the congregation up and fill the pews and the baskets with money might have forgotten to tell you this truth: *God loves you!* How do I know? Breathe. You didn't do that on your own. God knew what God was doing when God made you the beautiful, strong, smart, witty, funny, creative, well-versed and powerful being that you are. The only thing that's wicked about you is your jump shot or the way you walk your walk. Some may not like it. But some don't like bees or are allergic to grass or can't stand snow. That doesn't mean that each, just like you, doesn't have a purpose. So keep living long enough to get to your purpose. That means protect yourself—heart, mind and body.

# Terik Johnson

Terik Johnson, national director of youth and college affairs of Young-Nation, is author of the upcoming book *Problem Child: Born into Trouble, Destined for Success.*

The battle to prevent the contraction of HIV in the African-American lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community is long and hard. Countless numbers of community-based organizations have been created, hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent and several vaccines have been thought to be successful in prevention, but the rate of HIV contraction within the community has continued to grow, especially among African-American men who have sex with men.

The answers to the question of "why?" will be highly contested and full of opinions. However, since none of the prevention specialists, infectious disease experts and executive directors of organizations whose sole aim is to prevent HIV contraction in the community have been successful in the overall reduction of the rate of HIV contractions in the community, we should not timidly assess their work.

The African American LGBT community is still contracting HIV because while prevention is noble, contraction is profitable. Follow the money and one will find the enemy.

According to the Henry J. Kaiser Foundation (www.kff.org), a nonpartisan source of facts, information and analysis, "To date, the U.S. government has invested more than $100 billion in combating the epidemic" since 1981. President Barack Obama requested $21.5 billion for domestic HIV/AIDS [spending] in February of 2012. Of that, the estimated disbursements of the funds are a healthy $14.9 billion in care and treatment, $2.8 billion in research, $2.7 billion in cash housing assistance, and a relatively minor $1 billion in prevention.

Now, $1 billion is a lot of money! But is it enough to combat a $100 billion-plus problem?

Some prevention specialists seem quick to point the finger at socioeconomic issues, lack of awareness and stigma as the enemy; while some underhandedly slander another's programs to acquire the other's funding. Spend one week in a community-based organization that targets the African-American LGBT community and you will discover a new definition for scandalous—mainly because there is NOT enough money to effectively combat the contraction of HIV in the community. This situation creates a competitive instead of effective environment.

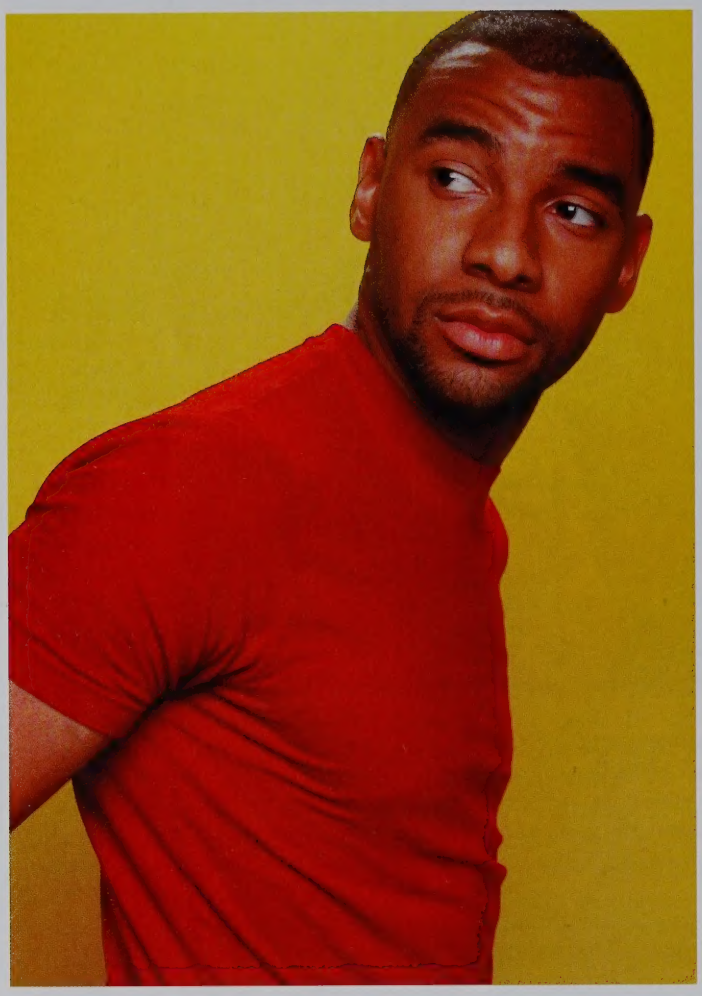
Prevention must include more than sex education and condoms. Comparative studies show that homelessness and unemployment have a big effect on HIV contraction. People who don't have a place to live or a job to maintain are several times more likely to engage in risky behaviors, including unprotected sex. It should not amaze us that, among black men who have sex with men between the ages of 13 and 29, contractions rose 48% when unemployment within that same demographic (16-29) is an estimated 22.1%.

Perhaps giving one of these brothers a respectable job with respectable benefits will reinstall a sense of self-respect that would in turn cause them to respect one another enough to protect one another. Perhaps hiring an African-American LGBT citizen would occupy 7-12 hours of their day and prohibit multiple sex partners, thereby reducing the risk of contraction. Maybe giving an administrative job to a struggling transgendered person would keep them from prostitution or other attempts to sustain themselves in a transphobic society? Of course not all are unemployed; not all are prostitutes; but those that are deserve more real help.

One thing is sure. There's not enough money to try it.

It is not enough to be accepted. It is not enough to be educated. It is not enough to be encouraged. If priority to sustain life is not equally as important to protecting life, then one would question if life is worth protecting at all. This is a generation battling with values; questioning the need to protect what society obviously does not value.

People do not care how much we know until we show how much we care. More money and creative implementation will provide the resources needed to effectively reduce the contraction of HIV in the community.



# Ken Like Barbie

Ken Like Barbie, writer, community activist and blogger, addresses issues in the gay community via his blog and webisodes at faceboook.com/kenlikebarbie.

Why are we in the African-American LGBT community still contracting HIV?

What makes me so manic about this subject is that there's no simple answer to this question. It wasn't until I contracted the virus myself that I even felt obligated to educate myself on the issues. What I can tell you is that it seems that wherever there is an opportunity for the African American to be disenfranchised, whether it be in poverty or prison, if there is room for disparity, we normally take the lead.

There are activists who will talk about all the socioeconomic contributors that greatly increase our exposure to the virus—how drugs and alcohol are classified risk factors and how their peddlers have been prominent fixtures in predominantly black communities. How a lack of health care and education become precursors to behaviors such as prostitution, and fates such as incarceration can easily lead to exposure when safer sex practices can't be or aren't at play. How being a community already riddled with red alerts for other sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhea, herpes and chlamydia ups the ante just that much more for allowing HIV the opportunity to infect.

But, sadly, it seems the only people who know those statistics are those who either surveil them, report them and/or are them. And unless you place somewhere amongst those three categories, more than likely you wouldn't be able to tell me that one in three gay black men are infected with HIV and 20 percent don't know, because you probably wouldn't know. You wouldn't know how to stress the importance of wearing condoms at all times because two out of three new HIV cases don't happen during spells of overt promiscuity but during quieter, less threatening situations like those of relationships because that's typically when the condoms do come off. You wouldn't know that when the researchers refer to poverty that they're just not talking about dilapidated sidewalks and a lack of financial wherewithal but also a lack of knowledge... and HIV is a symptom of poverty.

Whether or not we as African Americans are having good sex or frequent sex, according to the numbers we account for 13 percent of the United States population, but we represent 54 percent of all infected Americans. We in the African-American community are still contracting HIV because HIV, despite the media's early portrayal of the disease being solely a white gay man's issue, has always been a silent predator among us. The other silent predator in the African-American LGBT community has been ourselves and our silence.

What we have been uncomfortable to admit to our peers, whether it be by fear or ignorance, is that we've been dying alongside our white counterparts from HIV, too. We continue to have sex in poverty. But to say this aloud would somehow ruin the anonymity that we think we've gained by keeping so quiet. If we never admit to being affected then maybe the disease will rid itself is the train of thought. However, in this case what we fail to say and what some of us don't know to say we do at our own detriment. HIV will continue to rape our community slowly.

# Jeffrey King

Jeffrey King is founder and executive director of In the Meantime Men's Group, Inc. in Los Angeles.

Black men are still contracting HIV because far too many of us are continuing to engage in unprotected sex despite knowing the facts. The presence of HIV among black men is a complex issue comprised of a multitude of issues. HIV, like many health-related disparities that disproportionately impact black people, is the manifestation of both deeply rooted internal and severely harsh external factors. The compounded impact of racism, homophobia, stigma, depression and poverty is but one layer of the co-factors that stems from the root of global racism.

The reality is that we are the key to the solution to the problem.

Far too many black men have given up on plastic sex. As the multitude of complex issues continue to overly impact our lives, the idea that we also have to surrender our sexual expression and right to feel good is a lot to ask. So many people would rather risk HIV for a moment of sexual freedom.

Black men must come to grips with the fact that we are merely human beings asked to consistently engage in what we/I call responsible safe sex behavior—i.e., sex with a condom for the rest our of lives. I preach it and teach it every day, knowing that a young man is only young once and, whether he is gay or straight, he too just wants to live and love freely. This is a reality that we continue to suppress because it is not politically correct to acknowledge that sexual expression is normal or that people simply want to feel good.

We are still contracting HIV at alarming rates because our own black community and national community have yet to prioritize HIV as one of the most critical issues impacting black people in the history of the United States. We have yet to call for a national state of emergency where people take to the streets and protest in mass numbers.

Black gay men have yet to demand that our local and national elected officials stop ignoring our calls to action and to allocate resources to support a comprehensive community mobilization effort that is led by black people.

Let's be clear that yes, homophobia and racism fueled by fear has resulted in a severely depressed black gay male community. This makes it even more challenging for our people to step up to the plate collectively.

The fight continues. It's 2011 and HIV/AIDS continues to devastate the lives of those already overburdened with racism, poverty and the overpopulation of institutionalized slave camps called prisons. The real issues facing black men continue to be ignored by too many—even by those who have received millions of dollars to facilitate HIV prevention, treatment and care on our behalf. My rant is in no way intended to downplay the many dedicated people who continue to work tirelessly to end HIV.

The most recent mantra that claims HIV-prevention efforts have failed is nothing less than a stinging slap in the face of community-based organizations who—in earnest—have reached out and provided spaces for healing to a community living in fear, shame and silence. Some would say our community is invisible. Wow. Really? So my message is to our young black brothers around the globe.

Be outraged at facing the reality that while the rates of HIV among other young gay men has leveled off, the rates of HIV continue to rise among young black gay men—and we haven't seen the worst yet.

Be outraged at knowing that our very own black community would rather talk about HIV in general terms rather than acknowledge the horrible truth: Our fathers and sons are disproportionately infected with HIV and physiologically traumatized by the brutal acts of hatred perpetrated by our very own self-appointed spokesmen of God as they teach our people to hate—or at most tolerate—black men who have sex with men.

Be outraged at experiencing and witnessing the painful disenfranchisement of young black gay men who dare to come out to their families and support networks.

Be outraged that people who look like us often misspeak on our behalf when talking to the White House or local HIV planning boards as they advocate the medicalization of HIV over prevention.

Be outraged that both local and federal governments have yet to prioritize HIV and fully fund efforts on our behalf.

Be outraged that other issues within the broader LGBT community continue to trump HIV activism.

Now, young brothers, stand up and build a better life for yourself, knowing that it will not be easy. Know that you are fighting for life in a cold, cruel world that would rather see you dependent and powerless than strong and self-sufficient.

You have but one choice and that is to live. There are those who will help you. You have but to seek. You have but to ask. Demand your right to live free of fear, shame and silence. Claim your ability to stand on your own. And never, ever give up.

# BOSTON'S OTHER CLUB SCENE

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker

Founded in 2009, the Hispanic Black Gay Coalition (HBGC) has been working as one of a small number of nonprofit organizations in the Boston area dedicated to community building among black, Hispanic and Latino lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. One of the goals of the founders was to give a voice to LGBT individuals of color, working to inspire and empower individuals to improve their livelihood through activism, education and community.

In the beginning of HBGC's formation, its organizers were trying to come up with programs and activities they thought would be meaningful and appealing to the diverse audience they wanted to engage. They knew for sure they didn't want to limit themselves, nor their audience, to activities centered on clubs and bars. During a brainstorming dinner one evening, HBGC member Robert Harris suggested that the group try putting together a book club; it would be a smart way to get a group of people together to have thoughtful dialogue on a number of topics. The book club would offer a chance to engage, educate and entertain.

The HBGC Book Club was officially born in March 2010. Today the book club attendance averages 30 people at every monthly gathering, with as many as 47 people for a meeting. With an emphasis on diversity, HBGC has been able to attract a group of participants that represents their commitment to inclusivity: men and women, of all shades of black and brown ranging in age from 18 to mid-50s. "Frankly, there are not many activities that are specifically targeted toward the black and Hispanic LGBTQ community in Boston," says Harris.

"And of the events that are offered, most, if not all, tend to be more social in nature," Harris says. "While there is certainly a social component to the book club, we also provide, more importantly, a forum to discuss important issues affecting our community." Creating that safe space for sharing is very vital in community development. Given the familial environment of the club, people have used the platform to make personal disclosures and find support.

"I think the popularity of [HBGC book club] can be attributed to, at least, three factors," says Harris. "First, it is very unique. There is nothing like it offered in the LGBTQ community in the Boston area. Second, because we provide food and drink, it takes on the feel of Sunday dinner—an opportunity for members of the community to share and fellowship. In fact, people often hang around and socialize long after the book club meeting has ended. Third, the discussions are, in a word, fascinating."

The books selected by the group are either written by LGBT authors of color or focus on some aspect of the LGBT community of color, and all topics are fair game. Because of this, books and subsequent discussions moderated by a rotating group member have covered topics including love, family, sex, relationships, money and health. Adding to the lively discussion at meetings is that once the club has selected a book, they extend an invitation to the author to participate in the book club meeting—either in person or via Skype. Harris is a firm believer that if the authors participate, they add much to the discussion.

Harris, who served as the facilitator for the first year of the club, says bisexuality was always a controversial topic because there are those who simply do not believe it is a legitimate orientation. As a past facilitator Harris says discussions regarding relationship dynamics have also been quite provocative. "When you put 30 to 40 people in a room and ask them the same question, the responses can be very unpredictable and unbelievably entertaining," he says.

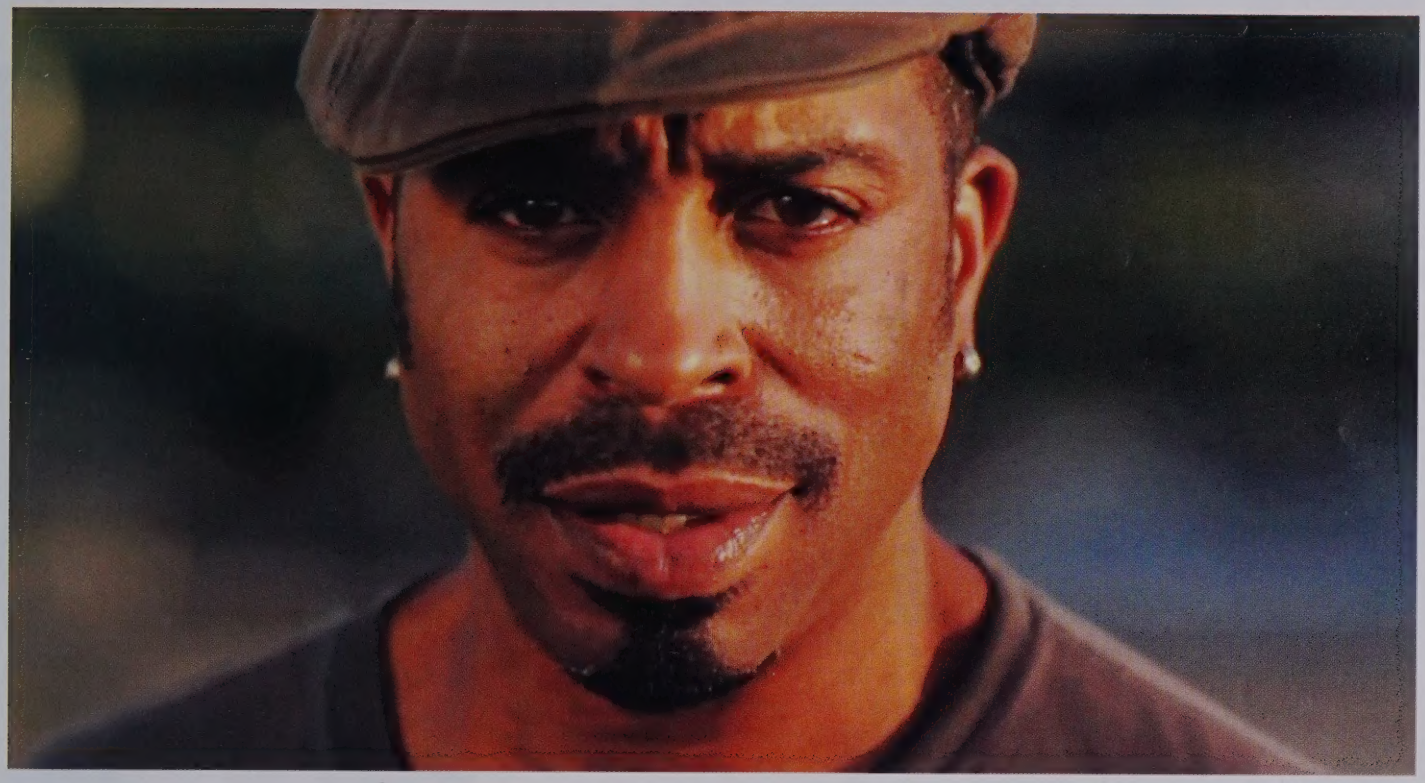
Harris realizes that the book club is, for many members, an introduction to an organization that offers a number of other activities including community service projects, coming out support and discussion groups. HBGC credits the book club—still its most popular program—with contributing to the building of a strong sense of community among members and as something they hope that members take pride in for what they have accomplished. HBGC is writing a new chapter in the black, Hispanic and Latino LGBT community of Boston, one page and one book club meeting at a time.

*continued on page 28*

# BREAKTHROUGHS

Words/L. Michael Gipson

## Marshall Titus' video and single "I Will" make waves on the Internet.



One never knows when and how their ship will come in. After a performance career spanning over thirty years, Chicago-based singer/songwriter/producer Marshall Titus wanted to take "bolder strokes" with his indie soul and dance music career, and has done it with a heretofore little known mustard seed of hope, a song titled "I Will." In one courageous move, Titus makes history with the first music video to address same-sex HIV stigma in the black gay/SGL community in an optimistic and compassionate way.

Lush with beautiful black men facing love, lust, pain and HIV, the video has already gone viral on Facebook, Twitter, and numerous black, gay, and black gay blogs and web sites. Warmly and skillfully lensed by photographer and director John Gress, the "I Will" video simultaneously represents many breakthroughs including a much-deserved spotlight on Marshall Titus, who is gracefully representing the mature black gay man and quietly illuminating what has already been a storied artistic career.

The Windy City performer has shared the stage with Stephanie Mills in *The Wiz*, done a stint with *Dreamgirls*, was featured in *Five Guys Named Moe* and even had a cameo in *Barbershop*, among other theater and film gigs. An in-demand session, jingle and background singer, Titus has also produced artists like Dennis Edwards of the Temptations, a legend whose gravelly instrument is eerily similar to Titus' own. Further, Titus has written for A-list artists such as Linda Clifford; recorded and produced two full-length albums (*Titus Vol. 1* and *The Reality of Dreams Project*), and released a few dance ditties that gained traction and loyal overseas fans. Yet the doe-eyed singer with the matinee idol looks has largely stayed under the mainstream and gay radar as a working artist. Luckily, "I Will" is changing that and for a worthy cause.

"The video will hopefully change people's perspective as to how we treat each other and see each other, as opposed to creating distances and fear," says Titus in an interview with BlackGayMensBlog.com. Closing the distances is more than what Titus and Gress have done with this video; they've opened the door for us to eliminate the HIV stigma that does nobody any good, especially the black gay men who continue to lead the nation's HIV/AIDS infection rates. Now Titus and Gress have delivered a teaching tool gift-wrapped in a bright musical bow. It's up to the community to answer the call.

"Let's get the conversation going and encourage people all over the world to live a more courageous life and treat each other with greater dignity and tolerance," says Titus.

To access his music or learn more about Marshall Titus visit www.marshalltitus.com.

# THE COLD BRINGS THE HEAT: New Styles For Winter

Words/Troy Artis

Summer has passed and the cold weather has finally set in. It's time to get winter fabulous, kids; time to wrap up in layers of clothing for the colder months ahead. Do away with those Bermuda shorts and booty shorts, flip flops and tanks we know you love. Make way for heavy wool, leather coats, hats, boots and, my personal favorite, the scarf.

Designers are on point and offer so much for the season. The one word to describe all the collections is "rich": Rich colors, styles, textures and fabrics dominate the runways of New York, Paris and Milan for 2012. Here are some of the hot trends to look for.

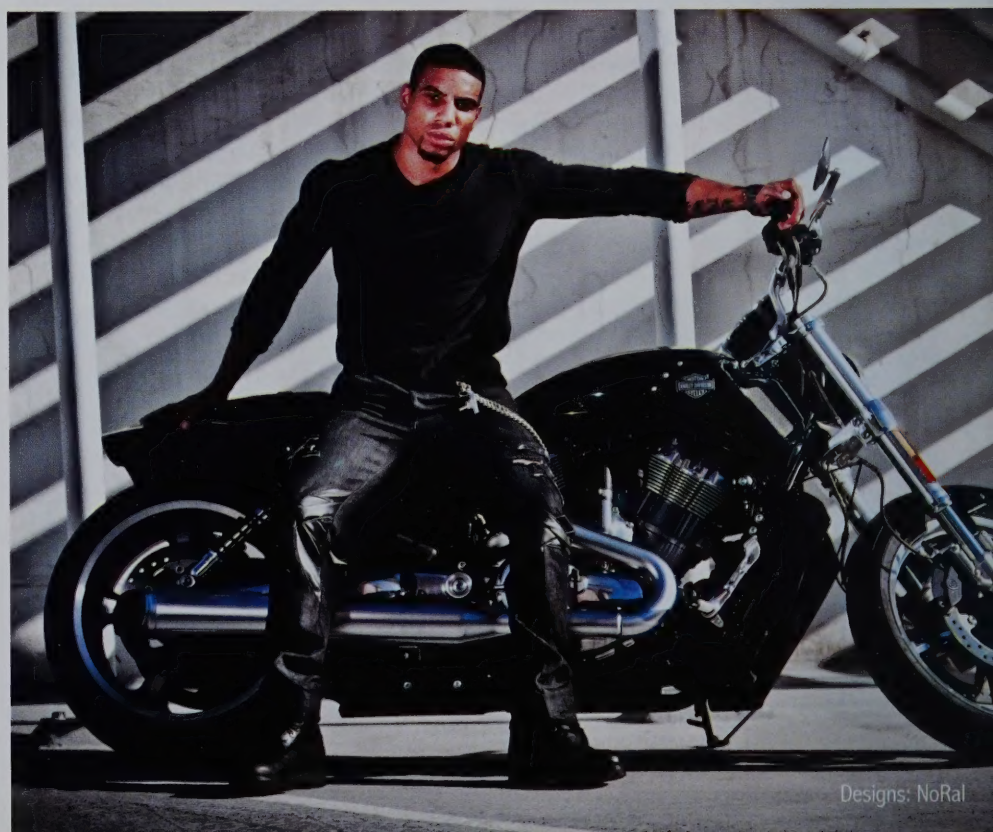
## The Perfect Jean

Jeans are one of those staples in everyone's wardrobe. This season I was thrilled to not see one pair of saggy or oversized jeans on the runway. Designers opted for the slim and more tailored jean with fantastic embellishments. LaRon Hickerson for NoRal, a West Coast designer, has been synonymous with swimwear; he now has designed the perfect jean for men this season. The Moto Cross Jean with vinyl trim is the go-to jean for day and club wear. The look is masculine yet it funks you up a bit. This is the best and coolest jeans ever made from natural fibers and eco-friendly fabrics. Keep it simple with the perfect jean and easy-fit tops. I'm so happy the fashion powers that be did away with the baggy jeans—R.I.P.

## Luxe Fabrics

Luxurious fabrics are a must for the season. At Salvatore Ferragamo and Versace, colored leather, furs, cashmere, exotic skins, velvets and almost anything that looked and felt rich dominated the runway. Mr. Witherspoon of The Brownstone (in Harlem) offers luxury fabrics in his collection of leather jackets with fur collars and cuffs. Jackets are mixed with denim and leather and make a strong statement. The colors are citrus lemon yellow and brick orange mixed with neutrals. "Clothing is disposable these days, like Burger King or McDonald's fast food," says Mr. Witherspoon, who designs not just clothes but an experience for his customers. Witherspoon's fashionable pieces can be in your closet for a lifetime and still remain current. "As a black gay man, it's important to always put your best foot forward; you won't get a second chance to make a first impression!"

Designs: Mr. Witherspoon



Designs: NoRal

## Tailored to Fit

Tailored clothing is huge for the season. Designers showed extreme tailoring in jackets, shirts, dresses, suits and outerwear. Fine tailored clothing just looks, fits and feels better. I'm a huge fan of tailored clothing; being a thick guy, it's a must that my clothes fit perfect. There is nothing better than a well-made tailored suit that lays on the body perfectly. And for women, the bold, classic and modern style of Manhattan's SK Wilbur offers fine tailored clothing for the voluptuous woman. Hot colors, unique shapes and a whole lot of fabulousness is what you get at SK Wilbur; his signature exposed zippers add a special touch to his tailored dresses. Individuality and owning your look is key.

Designs: SK Wilbur

## Military Butch

Clothing and accessories inspired by military uniforms continue to stay in fashion; the trend is completely unavoidable. Military-chic styled coats and outerwear is so now. This trend is hugely popular; just make sure you nail it without looking like the draft has been reinstated.

## All Dotted Up

Polka dots were all the rage at most of the shows; it's one of those trends that surfaces every few years. This season they return with a more modern approach. The dots are soft and somewhat distorted as hazy prints in shirts, dresses, neckwear, shoes—and even a suit by Marc Jacobs. Try adding elements of polka dots to your look in a neck tie or soft silk shirt. Men beware; you can easily overdo this trend, with grave results. Polka dots head to toe is a recipe for disaster so be careful with your dot selections.

## Chunky Knits

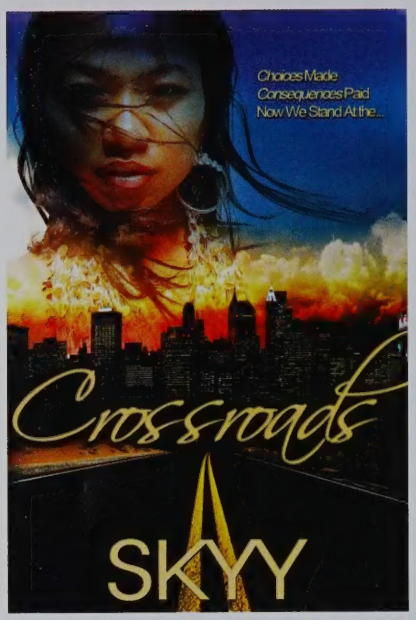
These soft and warm sweaters are another huge trend for the season and they can be found in bright vibrant colors with Nordic motifs. It's important that the sweater fits your frame; oversized and chunky is a bad combination. Go for the soft chunky knits that lay on the body; they show off the frame and certainly get attention.

## Gray Is the New Black

All shades of the classic gray are paired with black and white and even bright colors for a polished casual or business look. Michael Kors and Dolce & Gabbana are famous for the gray suit and outerwear for the professional man. Be sure to add a splash of color so your look won't be all washed out or, even worse, blend in with the crowd.

When selecting your looks for the season, go out of the box; it's OK to be different. Most importantly, make sure your clothes are comfortable. When you are comfortable in your clothes your personality can shine. And always remember to be fabulous!

*For more global runway fashion news follow Troy on twitter.com/stylishmaven*
*E-mail: stylishmaven@yahoo.com*




## Crossroads
### SKYY

www.simplyskyy.com

April "Skyy" Blair, also know as just "Skyy," is celebrating the release of her third novel, *Crossroads*. *Crossroads* follows the lives of a group of friends attending a historically black university in Memphis, TN. The book, third in a series—which began with *Choices*, followed by *Consequences*— features Denise, the sexy star-basketball player. She has recovered from injuries she suffered during an incident with a stalker and is off to New York to follow her basketball dreams—only to hit a bump in the road. Denise's true love Lena is not far behind. Life with a female basketball star can bring its own set of complications. Will Lena get her happily ever after or will the little princess finally get a dose of what the real world has to offer?

[Get Off] Your Ass
and DO Something!
An Empowering Collection of
Sermons, Sayings, Status Updates
and Tweets for Real Life + Everyday Living
Kevin E. Taylor

## Get Off Your Ass and Do Something!
### Kevin E. Taylor

www.kevinetaylor.biz

While many pastors wait for Sunday morning to offer their words of wisdom, Rev. Kevin E. Taylor has taken church to social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Vimeo) to reach people searching for spiritual sustenance. Taylor has assembled sermons from his ten years as a pastor, twenty years in ministry and a lifetime of creative writing to produce *Get Off Your Ass and Do Something: An Empowering Collection of Sermons, Sayings, Status Updates and Tweets for Real Life and Everyday Living*. The jolting title was inspired by Jesus' descision to ride an ass into Jeruselem so he could be accessible to the people—the action that cost him his human life.

With such sermon titles as "Struggle Up," "Partna Let Me Upgrade," "Are You Waiting For Any Particular Shade of Green?" and the sermon that birthed the book's catchy cover, Taylor uses his unique in-your-face style to teach, inspire and motivate.

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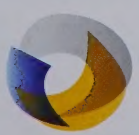

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**What is the most important information I should know about COMPLERA?**

**COMPLERA can cause serious side effects, including:**

**1. Build-up of an acid in your blood (lactic acidosis).** Lactic acidosis can happen in some people who take COMPLERA or similar (nucleoside analogs) medicines. **Lactic acidosis** is a serious medical emergency that can lead to death.

Lactic acidosis can be hard to identify early, because the symptoms could seem like symptoms of other health problems. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get any of the following symptoms which could be signs of lactic acidosis:**

- feeling very weak or tired
- have unusual (not normal) muscle pain
- have trouble breathing
- have stomach pain with
  - nausea (feel sick to your stomach)
  - vomiting
- feel cold, especially in your arms and legs
- feel dizzy or lightheaded
- have a fast or irregular heartbeat

**2. Severe liver problems.** Severe liver problems can happen in people who take COMPLERA or similar medicines. In some cases these liver problems can lead to death. Your liver may become large (hepatomegaly) and you may develop fat in your liver (steatosis) when you take COMPLERA.

**Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following symptoms of liver problems:**

- your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice).
- dark "tea-colored" urine
- light-colored bowel movements (stools)
- loss of appetite for several days or longer
- nausea
- stomach pain

**You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or severe liver problems if you are female, very overweight (obese), or have been taking COMPLERA or a similar medicine containing nucleoside analogs for a long time.**

**3. Worsening of Hepatitis B infection.** If you also have hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection and you stop taking COMPLERA, your HBV infection may become worse (flare-up). A "flare-up" is when your HBV infection suddenly returns in a worse way than before. COMPLERA is not approved for the treatment of HBV, so you must discuss your HBV therapy with your healthcare provider.

- Do not let your COMPLERA run out. Refill your prescription or talk to your healthcare provider before your COMPLERA is all gone.
- Do not stop taking COMPLERA without first talking to your healthcare provider.
- If you stop taking COMPLERA, your healthcare provider will need to check your health often and do regular blood tests to check your HBV infection. Tell your healthcare provider about any new or unusual symptoms you may have after you stop taking COMPLERA.

**What is COMPLERA?**

COMPLERA is a prescription HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) medicine that:

- is used to treat HIV-1 in adults who have **never** taken HIV medicines before. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome).
- contains 3 medicines, (rilpivirine, emtricitabine, tenofovir disoproxil fumarate) combined in one tablet. EMTRIVA and VIREAD are HIV-1 (human immunodeficiency virus) nucleoside analog reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs) and EDURANT is an HIV-1 non-nucleoside analog reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI).

It is not known if COMPLERA is safe and effective in children under the age of 18 years.

**COMPLERA may help:**

- Reduce the amount of HIV in your blood. This is called your "viral load".
- Increase the number of white blood cells called CD4+ (T) cells that help fight off other infections.

Reducing the amount of HIV and increasing the CD4+ (T) cell count may improve your immune system. This may reduce your risk of death or infections that can happen when your immune system is weak (opportunistic infections).

**COMPLERA does not cure HIV infections or AIDS.**

- Always practice safer sex.
- Use latex or polyurethane condoms to lower the chance of sexual contact with any body fluids such as semen, vaginal secretions, or blood.
- Never re-use or share needles.

Ask your healthcare provider if you have any questions about how to prevent passing HIV to other people.

**Who should not take COMPLERA?**

- Do not take COMPLERA if your HIV infection has been previously treated with HIV medicines.
- **Do not take COMPLERA if you are taking certain other medicines.** For more information about medicines that **must not** be taken with COMPLERA, see **"What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking COMPLERA?"**

**What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking COMPLERA?**
**Before you take COMPLERA, tell your healthcare provider if you:**

- have liver problems, including hepatitis B or C virus infection
- have kidney problems
- have ever had a mental health problem
- have bone problems
- are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. It is not known if COMPLERA can harm your unborn child

  **Pregnancy Registry.** There is a pregnancy registry for women who take antiviral medicines during pregnancy. Its purpose is to collect information about the health of you and your baby. Talk to your healthcare provider about how you can take part in this registry.
- are breast-feeding or plan to breast-feed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that mothers with HIV not breastfeed because they can pass the HIV through their milk to the baby. It is not known if COMPLERA can pass through your breast milk and harm your baby. Talk to your healthcare provider about the best way to feed your baby.

**Tell your healthcare provider about all the medicines you take,** including prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, and herbal supplements.

**COMPLERA may affect the way other medicines work, and other medicines may affect how COMPLERA works, and may cause serious side effects.** If you take certain medicines with COMPLERA, the amount of COMPLERA in your body may be too low and it may not work to help control your HIV infection. The HIV virus in your body may become resistant to COMPLERA or other HIV medicines that are like it.

**Do not take COMPLERA if you also take these medicines:**

- COMPLERA provides a complete treatment for HIV infection. Do not take other HIV medicines with COMPLERA.
- the anti-seizure medicines carbamazepine (CARBATROL®, EQUETRO®, TEGRETOL®, TEGRETOL-XR®, TERIL®, EPITOL®), oxcarbazepine (TRILEPTAL®), phenobarbital (LUMINAL®), phenytoin (DILANTIN®, DILANTIN-125®, PHENYTEK®)
- the anti-tuberculosis medicines rifabutin (MYCOBUTIN®), rifampin (RIFATER®, RIFAMATE®, RIMACTANE®, RIFADIN®) and rifapentine (PRIFTIN®)
- a proton pump inhibitor medicine for certain stomach or intestinal problems, including esomeprazole (NEXIUM®, VIMOVO®), lansoprazole (PREVACID®), omeprazole (PRILOSEC®), pantoprazole sodium (PROTONIX®), rabeprazole (ACIPHEX®)
- more than 1 dose of the steroid medicine dexamethasone or dexamethasone sodium phosphate
- St. John's wort *(Hypericum perforatum)*

**If you are taking COMPLERA, you should not take:**

- other medicines that contain tenofovir (VIREAD®, TRUVADA®, ATRIPLA®)
- other medicines that contain emtricitabine or lamivudine (EMTRIVA®, COMBIVIR®, EPIVIR® or EPIVIR-HBV®, EPZICOM®, TRIZIVIR®)
- rilpivirine (EDURANT™)
- adefovir (HEPSERA®)

**Also tell your healthcare provider if you take:**

- an antacid medicine that contains aluminum, magnesium hydroxide, or calcium carbonate. Take antacids at least 2 hours before or at least 4 hours after you take COMPLERA.
- a histamine-2 blocker medicine, including famotidine (PEPCID®), cimetidine (TAGAMET®), nizatidine (AXID®), or ranitidine hydrochloride (ZANTAC®). Take these medicines at least 12 hours before or at least 4 hours after you take COMPLERA.
- the antibiotic medicines clarithromycin (BIAXIN®), erythromycin (E-MYCIN®, ERYC®, ERY-TAB®, PCE®, PEDIAZOLE®, ILOSON®), and troleandomycin (TAO®)
- an antifungal medicine by mouth, including fluconazole (DIFLUCAN®), itraconazole (SPORANOX®), ketoconazole (NIZORAL®), posaconazole (NOXAFIL®), voriconazole (VFEND®)
- methadone (DOLOPHINE®)

**Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you are not sure if your medicine is one that is listed above.**

**Know the medicines you take. Keep a list of your medicines and show it to your healthcare provider and pharmacist when you get a new medicine.** Your healthcare provider and your pharmacist can tell you if you can take these medicines with COMPLERA. Do not start any new medicines while you are taking COMPLERA without first talking with your healthcare provider or pharmacist. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a list of medicines that can interact with COMPLERA.

**How should I take COMPLERA?**

- **Stay under the care of your healthcare provider during treatment with COMPLERA.**
- **Take COMPLERA exactly as your healthcare provider tells you to take it.**
- **Always take COMPLERA with a meal.** Taking COMPLERA with a meal is important to help get the right amount of medicine in your body. A protein drink does not replace a meal.
- Do not change your dose or stop taking COMPLERA without first talking with your healthcare provider. See your healthcare provider regularly while taking COMPLERA.
- If you miss a dose of COMPLERA within 12 hours of the time you usually take it, take your dose of COMPLERA **with a meal** as soon as possible. Then, take your next dose of COMPLERA at the regularly scheduled time. If you miss a dose of COMPLERA by more than 12 hours of the time you usually take it, wait and then take the next dose of COMPLERA at the regularly scheduled time.
- Do not take more than your prescribed dose to make up for a missed dose.
- When your COMPLERA supply starts to run low, get more from your healthcare provider or pharmacy. It is very important not to run out of COMPLERA. The amount of virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time.
- If you take too much COMPLERA, contact your local poison control center or go to the nearest hospital emergency room right away.

**What are the possible side effects of COMPLERA?**

**COMPLERA may cause the following serious side effects, including:**

- **See "What is the most important information I should know about COMPLERA?"**
- **New or worse kidney problems** can happen in some people who take COMPLERA. If you have had kidney problems in the past or take other medicines that can cause kidney problems, your healthcare provider may need to do blood tests to check your kidneys during your treatment with COMPLERA.
- **Depression or mood changes. Tell your healthcare provider right away if you have any of the following symptoms:**
  - feeling sad or hopeless
  - feeling anxious or restless
  - have thoughts of hurting yourself (suicide) or have tried to hurt yourself
- **Bone problems** can happen in some people who take COMPLERA. Bone problems include bone pain, softening or thinning (which may lead to fractures). Your healthcare provider may need to do additional tests to check your bones.
- **Changes in body fat** can happen in people taking HIV medicine. These changes may include increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck ("buffalo hump"), breast, and around the main part of your body (trunk). Loss of fat from the legs, arms and face may also happen. The cause and long term health effect of these conditions are not known.
- **Changes in your immune system (Immune Reconstitution Syndrome)** can happen when you start taking HIV medicines. Your immune system may get stronger and begin to fight infections that have been hidden in your body for a long time. Tell your healthcare provider if you start having new symptoms after starting your HIV medicine.

The most common side effects of COMPLERA include:

- trouble sleeping (insomnia)
- abnormal dreams
- headache
- dizziness
- diarrhea
- nausea
- rash
- tiredness
- depression

Additional common side effects include:

- vomiting
- stomach pain or discomfort
- skin discoloration (small spots or freckles)
- pain

Tell your healthcare provider if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away.

These are not all the possible side effects of COMPLERA. For more information, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist.

Call your doctor for medical advice about side effects. You may report side effects to FDA at 1-800-FDA-1088 (1-800-332-1088).

**How do I store COMPLERA?**

- Store COMPLERA at room temperature 77 °F (25 °C).
- Keep COMPLERA in its original container and keep the container tightly closed.
- Do not use COMPLERA if the seal over the bottle opening is broken or missing.

**Keep COMPLERA and all other medicines out of reach of children.**

**General information about COMPLERA:**

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for purposes other than those listed in a Patient Information leaflet. Do not use COMPLERA for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give COMPLERA to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

This leaflet summarizes the most important information about COMPLERA. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for information about COMPLERA that is written for health professionals. For more information, call (1-800-445-3235) or go to www.COMPLERA.com.

**What are the ingredients of COMPLERA?**

**Active ingredients:** emtricitabine, rilpivirine hydrochloride, and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate

**Inactive ingredients:** pregelatinized starch, lactose monohydrate, microcrystalline cellulose, croscarmellose sodium, magnesium stearate, povidone, polysorbate 20. The tablet film coating contains polyethylene glycol, hypromellose, lactose monohydrate, triacetin, titanium dioxide, iron oxide red, FD&C Blue #2 aluminum lake, FD&C Yellow #6 aluminum lake.

This Patient Information has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

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Foster City, CA 94404

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GILEAD

# BMX: BLACK MEN FOR CHANGE

Words/Photo/Michael-Christopher

Kevin Sanders of Black Men's XChange, Washington, D.C.

*Washington, D.C. has long been known for its vibrant black same-gender loving community. For years people have flocked here for the hottest nightlife and events. But what happens when the party's over? There's not been as much emotional support as there has been places to get down on the dance floor. Very soon The District will welcome something new, affirming and unique: Black Men's XChange. I spoke with Kevin Sanders, the catalyst of BMX's newest chapter, to find out what it's all about.*

***SWERV: What is BMX?***
**Kevin Sanders:** BMX (Black Men's XChange) is an organization built on the philosophy that embraces the same-gender loving experience as an intrinsic facet of everyday black life. The first group was founded in 1989 by activist, writer and behavioral health expert Cleo Manago as an instrument of healing and empowerment for same gender-loving and bisexual men of African descent.

***SWERV: What is its mission?***
**KS:** BMX's Mission is to affirm, heal, educate, unify and promote healthy well-being and critical thinking among black people. Diverse in sexuality, class, culture and philosophy, BMX has been conducting activities that promote a healthy self-concept, sexual health, constructive decision making, and cultural affirmation among same-gender-loving, bisexual and heterosexual black populations across the country. By adopting the philosophy to affirm and educate black men, and the community at large, while providing tools for self-determination, community responsibility, self-actualization and the prevention of health threats (e.g. HIV, isolation, substance and other addictions, and mental instability), BMX has created an environment that advances black culture by unlearning ingrained anti-homosexual and anti-black male and female conditioning.

***SWERV: Does BMX reach out to the heterosexual community and, if so, how?***
**KS:** We believe that the African-American heterosexual community plays an important role in eliminating stigmas and anti-homosexual messages. We often dedicate nights to invite family, clergy, colleagues and other community members to our forums to support our members to build a better understanding of what we hope to achieve, which is to love one another. We cannot address the issues at large if we do not involve heterosexuals to discover that the negative perceptions they may have are nothing but myths. If we come together in respect, roll up our sleeves and do the necessary work, we'll achieve our goals.

***SWERV: How did you get involved with BMX?***
**KS:** I believe the Creator led me in this direction. After heartfelt prayer and meditation while healing from a very difficult breakup, I was surfing on Facebook searching for ways to get outside myself and be more proactive in the community. I stumbled upon one of BMX's videos, "I AM A MAN: Black Manhood & Sexual Diversity." I was captivated. The video spoke directly to me and my own unresolved issues. After researching and getting in touch with people affiliated with BMX, I reached out to Malcolm Harris, the organization's current national coordinator.

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# LORDS OF MIAMI



Elaborately decorated in a bright yellow and teal color scheme, Lords South Beach hotel adds an additional ray of sunshine to Miami. Situated in the heart of Miami's South Beach on Collins Avenue, Lords South Beach is the first gay hotel chain to open in the United States; it's the vanguard for the modern gay boutique hotel. Sexy, chic, affordable and fun, it raises the bar for what the discerning gay traveler can expect from a hotel.

With 54 rooms, three plunge pools and a variety of exciting hotel venues, including the Cha Cha Rooster Restaurant and Bar with cocktail partner Absolut Vodka, as well as choice guest amenities like the Lords Social Network, Lords South Beach has revolutionized the concept of innovative hospitality. Their Sunday cocktail/tea pool party is a must for those who like their parties hot and wet.

Community is also important to Lords; the "Rooms That Matter" initiative includes five designated rooms for which 10% of room sale proceeds are donated to charities that provide support for those in the LGBT community.

The hotel provides a liberal, proud, playful experience and a sense of community for guests who want to mix and mingle. Lords South Beach is conveniently located in a gay-friendly location at the center of South Beach's best restaurants, clubs, bars, shopping and beaches, including Miami's famed gay beach at 12th Street just steps away.

Lords South Beach Hotel
1120 Collins Ave.
Miami Beach, FL 33139
Phone: 877.448.4754
www.lordssouthbeach.com

# CONVERSATIONS

## *With Sundiata Alayé*

## Dear AIDS, Dear World

Dear AIDS,

It has been thirty years since you first swept in and changed the world as I knew it. Softly and quietly you came like a thief in the night, and in what seemed like a matter of months devastated lives, killed hopes, destroyed dreams and left millions of us wondering where you came from and how quickly we could get you to leave.

I remember you. I remember you well. I was so young back then, and so were my friends. The world was just opening up to us and we were just beginning to realize our dreams. Sure I had heard of you, but you were so far removed from me and from all that I loved and held dear. You were somewhere on the West Coast and affecting white men, so there was no need for me or any of us to pay too close attention. But you were sly and cunning. You didn't care who you affected. You came after the young and the old, the rich and the poor. You were cruel, unmerciful and indiscriminate in your arrival. You were vicious.

Then suddenly and without warning you began to close in on my community, then to my associations, and finally to my family, and my friends. One by one, some of the most precious and loving people in my life started to become sick from your touch until nothing around me looked familiar or felt real. I remember the devastation and the sadness. I remember the pain of burying my friends. I remember the pain you brought to us. Oh yes, I remember you well.

I attended so many funerals of people I loved and cared about that it still hurts me to think about it. I could fill a room with the people I remember; a large room, wall to wall with no chairs. I could fill a space the size of a football field or two with the spirits, dreams, hopes and desires of so many men, women and children whom I have loved and lost.

Thirty years later and you're still here, still as cunning and conniving as ever, parading around in your boldness and scheming with your co-conspirators to give the world a false sense of security. Indeed, you have convinced many of us that you are no longer a deadly desire but a "manageable condition." Yes. You keep drug companies enjoying huge profits while also keeping many of us mindless of the damage you still cause. How did you get them to play along? I'm curious! And just how did you get the media to cooperate so effectively with your plan to downplay your existence while many still suffer in silence around the world?

We've had enough of you! Thirty years is enough, don't you think? Haven't you done enough damage? Haven't you caused enough pain? We'd like to know what the world would be like without you. When are you finally going to leave us alone? Will you please just leave us alone? We hate you and we don't want you here.

*With outrage!!*

Dear World,

I know. I've heard all of this before. In fact, I've heard it since I was born, a little over thirty years ago. I've heard it so often, I'm as sick about it as you are! I wish I could disappear too, but I can't.

And it's not that I don't want to leave. I'd love to leave here. Who would want to hang around only to be hated, detested and despised all the time by everyone? I never asked for this and I don't want this anymore. I never did. If you really think hard about this what you may discover is that it is you that keeps me here. It's you. I know this is difficult to understand but I want you to listen closely.

You never took advantage of my unwelcome arrival or appreciate what you could have learned from me thirty years ago. Very few of you appreciated the depth of the love you had the capacity to bring forth as I affected your lives and the lives of those you loved. You had every reason to live in the reality of my arrival, a glorious second chance to see things differently and the power over your life to heal your old wounds. But you didn't look deep enough to find out who I was and who you really are.

I know your losses were great and, to tell you the truth, I couldn't believe the speed at which I began to replicate. I thought for sure that once people found out everything about me and how I come to you that I wouldn't stand a slim chance of survival. I gave you an opening to find love and tolerance, and to utilize all of your support systems to prevent me from causing

further harm. I thought I'd see you bond, galvanize, educate and take corrective actions to understand why I appeared when I did. Sadly, you failed. You failed miserably.

This isn't to say that you were presented with a whole lot of social and psychological issues before I came. Face it; you were already in bad shape before I came. You were. There was worldwide collective lovelessness, self-hatred, greed and a whole host of ills. Yet I could have never known how all of these things would combine to add fuel to my fire. If you consider it, maybe you'll find out that perhaps that's why I showed up in the first place. Maybe that's exactly why I came. Maybe I came to teach you something about yourselves, about your world, about love.

For years you used all kinds of things to numb your pain. Unfortunately, because of your inability or unwillingness (you pick) to surface your pain to heal it, you continued to resort to sex and drugs as the high you needed to ease the pain—even after I had made my presence known and even after you discovered that sex and drugs were my primary mode of transportation. I couldn't believe it myself.

Let me also make this clear: I didn't know a single one of the people I infected in that way. Not one! I didn't want to know them! You introduced them to me and gave me many more than I ever expected. Sacrificial lambs. Still today, some thiry years later, some of you are still acting out your pain and your fear by breaking some of the most key moral laws of this universe. You keep doing what you're doing and I keep getting blamed.

I must admit that for a while I thought maybe I was being defeated. I will also admit that I was relieved by the prospect of disappearing, but then something shifted, and there was suddenly a new age of sexual freedom. It felt as though I was in a time warp when I realized that I was gaining momentum and blooming in sex clubs, sex parties and random hookups from the Internet. If I was able to think—and you should know by now that I can't—I would swear that I was back where I first started thirty years ago. I don't know, but sometimes it seems that you just don't want me to leave.

Dear World, that lingering false sense of security that you talk about isn't me. It's you. I didn't do anything miraculous. I'm not a magician who magically disappeared, nor did I play tricks with your mind. You are the ones who drowned out the pain, the devastation and, yes, even the love that I was teaching you. The lack of media attention was a reflection of your own silence, not mine. Where are your marches now? It's not my fault that drug companies are making massive profits from the death and illness I cause. I have nothing to do with advertisements that don't show the reality of sickness; the incredible amount of change required to live with me, the medications, side effects and the absolute need for adherence to drug therapies. Can I help that many of you are still not being tested or accessing health care until critical services are needed because of my progression? I cannot be held accountable. I cannot think, but you can! So who is really responsible here?

Please do me this favor and listen very closely to what I'm saying to you. I don't want to have this conversation in another thirty years. Yes, I am here and, like you, I don't know why. I'm just a virus, but you give me much more power over you than you should by hating me, fearing me and denying me. For thirty years I've been trying to explain to you that I neither want the power you feed me, nor do I understand what to do with it. What I do know is that the power you do surrender makes me stronger, and as I get stronger you diminish. Please understand that it's not what I do that dictates whether I find my way to you, but what you do. You are so much more than you see. You are more than your body, your car, your home, your job, your looks. Collectively, as a world, you are so much deeper and much, much stronger.

Finally, dear World, I know you don't want me here. None of you do, and I'm clear about that. But I also know that it is your collective hate, anger, greed and lovelessness that keeps me here. I don't want to die any more than you do, but I do want this nightmare to end as much as you do. I want to be as done with you as you are with me so we can go back to business as usual. The problem as I see it is that you want these things without having to work on finding out what brought me to you in the first place.

If you recall, thirty years ago I did bring about some good in the world. As devastating as I was, I did bring millions of people around the world together to work for collective funding, collective research, collective resources for those I affected, and collective prayers for understanding. You might say that I brought millions of you together for a collective healing. Indeed, I brought many of you to your knees in prayer, compassion, love and affection, not only to your immediate family and friends but for the world. What happened to that loving energy? Where did the love and collective spirit go?

I know that my very appearance in this world is a call to love. Remember that. Don't fear me. Love me. Ironically, love is the only way to defeat me. As you start to see me differently, you will begin to see yourselves differently and when that happens, you will all become loving and enlightened beings and the sense of urgency to save yourselves, dear World, will become more evident and eventual. Stay focused.

*Love,*

*AIDS*

Peace, Blessings, Light, Love
Sundiata Alayé

# VOICES FROM THE STRUGGLE: *IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS*

Compiled by Jamil Fletcher

*It's been over thirty years since AIDS was first discovered in five gay men in Los Angeles. Since that initial report by the Centers for Disease Control on June 5th in 1981, AIDS has resulted in more than 25 million deaths worldwide. We asked a few recognized leaders in the field to share their thoughts on where we are in the fight against HIV/AIDS.*

**C. Virginia Fields**, president and CEO, National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Inc.

For over thirty years, the United States has lived in the long shadow of HIV/AIDS, a disease that, since 1981, has claimed the lives of over 600,000 Americans, according to estimates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Fortunately, we have made significant progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Through scientific research, we now have antiretroviral medications that allow persons living with HIV to live longer and better quality lives. These medications have also significantly reduced the transmission of HIV from mother to fetus and from mother to child.

As of July 13, 2010, the United States finally has a National HIV/AIDS Strategy thanks to the leadership of President Barack Obama. For the first time in the history of the domestic epidemic, our federal government has established goals, objectives and timelines to address prevention, treatment and care. That's the good news.

The bad news is there are still no effective vaccines against HIV and there is still no cure for AIDS. Despite the gains, we have a long, hard road ahead and many battles yet to be fought in the war against HIV/AIDS. The CDC estimates that there are 1.1 million Americans living with HIV, including approximately 545,000 who are black. African Americans, approximately 13 percent of the nation's total population, account for nearly 50 percent of all new HIV infections and AIDS cases as of 2009.

The National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Inc. encourages all Americans, especially African Americans, to get educated about HIV/AIDS; get tested so that you know your HIV status and can gain early access to treatment and care, if necessary; and get involved in community efforts to stop HIV/AIDS. By protecting ourselves and others, we protect our communities by significantly reducing the spread of HIV, hepatitis C, and other sexually transmitted infections.

**Ernest C. Hopkins**, director of legislative affairs at the San Francisco AIDS Foundation; chair of the National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition; and chair, Communities Advocating Emergency AIDS Relief (CAEAR) Coalition.

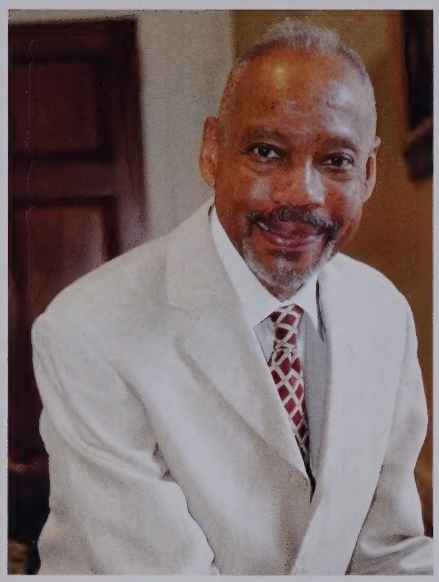
As a black gay federal policy advocate, this moment of evolution and realignment in the U.S. health care system is both tremendously exciting and treacherous. Driven by a period of rapid scientific discovery, and the passage of the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act, HIV-related prevention, medical care and supportive services is about to change dramatically. I worry that black HIV prevention and care providers are not ready for the change and will focus on key decision-making and policy development too late for their survival. If indigenous agencies are to survive we

*[Ernest C. Hopkins continued]*

must engage. We say they are important but don't act like it.

The United States HIV/AIDS movement has recently divided; there are those who see the HIV/AIDS epidemic as a dynamic construct, deeply influenced by poverty, social injustice, sexual behavior, homophobia, incarceration, homelessness and substance use to name a few drivers. There are others who feel those issues are too intractable and the primary focus should be on the disease itself and the biomedical ways to intervene on disease progression: drugs, medical exams, viral monitoring and treatment of other co-morbid conditions. Recent research findings demonstrate the value of microbicide gels, and retroviral drugs in HIV prevention and early drug treatment on reductions in community viral loads have shifted the power toward the biomedical side of the equation. Key policy makers suggest if we refocus our limited resources to these biomedical solutions we can fundamentally change the course of the epidemic by lowering HIV incidence and ending AIDS for next generation. The black community is largely silent in these critical discussions.

The National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition, the Black Gay Research Group and the Black Women's HIV Network are focusing on influencing both the national research agenda to ensure it pays appropriate attention to the questions that need to be answered for the black community, and that health policies are responsive to black gay men and black women—the most disproportionately impacted populations in the United States. The complex concerns of black women are rooted in the nexus between social stigma, incarceration, homophobia, poverty and substance use. The natural partnerships that should exist between black women and black gay men continue to be strained by competition for limited resources, bias, misinformation, homophobia and misogyny. We must work toward harmony to achieve the success we deserve. I look forward to continuing the work to get there.



**Frank J. Oldham**, president, National Association of People With AIDS (NAPWA)

It is hard for some of us to remember what the '80s and early '90s were like; it's so much easier not to revisit those months and years of a funeral every week. And who in 1990 could have imagined the world we live in now, fifteen years after the introduction of protease inhibitors and the cocktail technique of using them together for maximum effectiveness? In principle, everyone living with HIV today could be taking HAART [Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy] drugs, and almost everyone taking the drugs could be living a normal life with a normal life expectancy. I've lived with HIV for twenty-two years. One of my staff thinks he was infected in 1978. Aside from our pills twice a day, we live extremely normal lives.

The fight today is to make sure that everyone who has HIV knows it, that everyone who knows it has access to effective care, and that new infections become a thing of the past. We have the science to do that today. We know condoms work. We know treatment-as-prevention works. We know needle exchanges work. We know stable housing for the HIV-positive homeless works. We know targeted high-impact prevention outreach works.

And yet we still have between fifty and sixty thousand new infections in the United States every year. Stopping new infections isn't a scientific problem anymore—although we still need more science. It's a human, social, political problem. In this era of shrinking federal budgets, do we have the will to insist that the public, private and not-for-profit sectors pull together and devote the resources needed to end the epidemic? And can we articulate to a shell-shocked voting public why *this* fight is worth the resources *now*? It's about lives and human suffering, and we need to keep saying that. But it's also about avoiding crippling health care costs in the future by devoting resources today. The lifetime cost of caring for a new infection is roughly $350,000. That means each year's 50,000 new infections bring with them $17.5 billion in future costs. That's $17.5 *billion* needlessly wasted, every year, until we end this.

In these years of budget stress throughout the HIV advocacy community, it is very easy for honest differences of opinion to turn bitter. The controversy over pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a case in point. Some argue that men who have sex with men need it today if not sooner—a matter of life and death. Others fear, not without reason, that wider use of PrEP may lead to more unsafe sex. We at NAPWA think the PrEP genie is out of the bottle, and the question now is not whether PrEP will become a new tool in the HIV-prevention toolkit, but whether we roll it out in a way that maximizes lives saved and minimizes risk. We can do that better if we do it together.

Instead of fighting over a shrinking pie, we need to remind the public and our elected representatives why it is so important to increase the size of the pie to meet the need. We need to communicate the human cost of doing less than that —and the simple economic cost. We need to speak with one voice.

And we need to recover some of the crusading spirit of the '80s and early '90s. Remembering those days can be painful for some of us. But remembering what we accomplished then can remind us of what we can do today.

**Paul Kwata**, executive director of the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC)

Our movement is at a crossroads. The implementation of federal policies like the Affordable Care Act and the National HIV/AIDS Strategy have put us on a path to increase access to care, reduce infections and mitigate health disparities. This is critical if we are to address the disproportionate impact this epidemic has had and continues to have on communities of color, especially gay men of color. The three segments of the U.S. population with the highest number of HIV infections in 2009 were white, African American and Latino gay men, respectively. This was the first year that infections among Latino gay men outpaced that that of African-American women. Even more alarming, between 2006 and 2009, infections among young black gay men spiked 48 percent.

New biomedical interventions, however, like treatment as prevention and pre-exposure prophylaxis, offer powerful new prevention tools and serve as a clarion call for early and universal access to treatment. By ensuring that all people living with HIV and AIDS have access to highly active antiretroviral therapies [HAART], we can improve the health outcomes of those individuals, but also reduce the risk that they will transmit the virus to others by as much as 96 percent. Unfortunately, the difficult fiscal climate has put pressure on Washington and state legislators to reduce spending, threatening to undermine this progress. We have the potential to literally end the AIDS epidemic. We must fight to ensure that there is the political will to see that potential turn to reality.

**David J. Malebranche**, MD, MPH, associate professor, Emory University Division of General Medicine

In the fight against HIV/AIDS there is some good news and some not-so-good news. The good news is that there have been some remarkable advances in HIV medications, both the quality of them and the decreasing quantity of pills that folks have to take who are living with the virus. Additionally, research continues to move forward on microbicides (the gel that can be placed in the anus or vagina) to protect one against HIV, using HIV medications to prevent one from getting HIV if engaging in high risk behavior ("PrEP"), and vaccines.

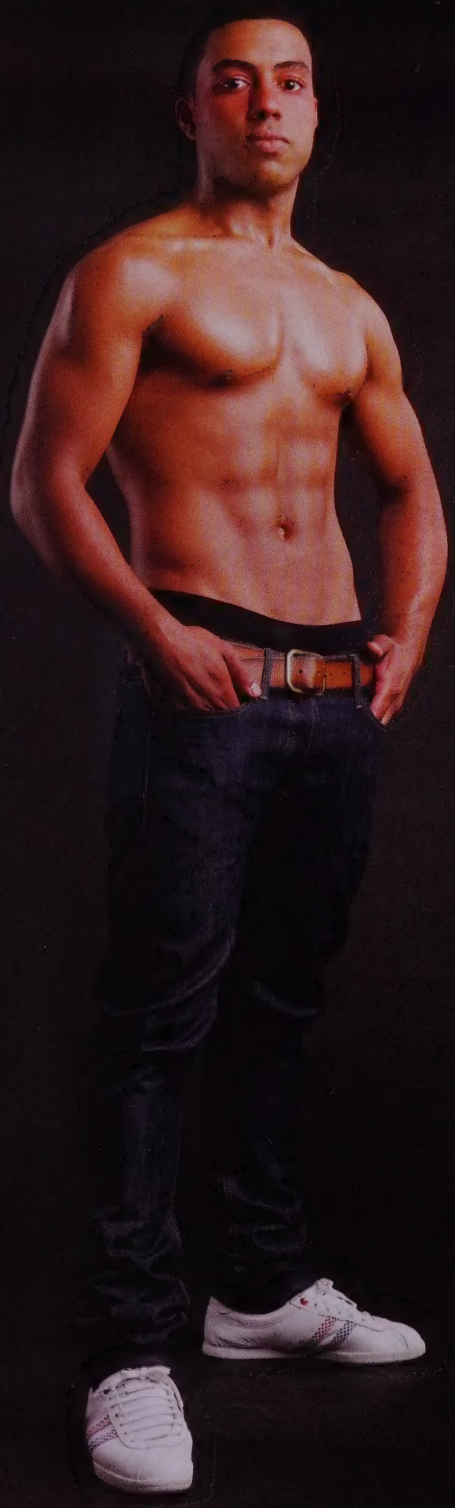
The not-so-good news is that even with these medical advances, the racial disparity in HIV cases, especially among young black same-gender-loving men, continues to rise. Unfortunately in the public health and medical communities, we have failed to prioritize the social inequities that black people of all sexualities face that create the foundation for health disparities. We have instead focused on quick medical advances to stem the tide of the worsening numbers, but we need to do a better job at looking long-term at ways to improve social issues such as poverty, unemployment, racism, homelessness, sexual prejudice and community violence. Focusing right now on these large structural issues that are wreaking havoc in black communities will help set the table for long-term solutions to improving and maintaining the overall physical, mental and sexual health of black people in the United States. This is a hard task, particularly given the horrible history and legacy of slavery in this country, and the current racism, classism, sexism and sexual prejudice forms of oppression that intersect to affect the lives of black people, and in particular black same-gender-loving men in this country.

To put it simply, we've achieved some amazing biomedical milestones, but we have much more work to do to address and heal the social ills driving the HIV epidemic.

**Jay Blackwell**, director of Capacity Building Office of Minority Health Resource Center

In 2011, I think more United States citizens are worried about surviving December 21, 2012 ["doomsday"] than have spent time reflecting on the impact of HIV and AIDS in their lifetime and responding to the terror it has presented worldwide. As yet another generation of youth wade into the gene pool, I see health educators getting bogged down by AIDS fatigue. I also see newcomers in the public health field exclaiming their disbelief that more people don't consider what it means to be HIV-negative or not knowing of a family member without the AIDS; you know, that stuff. When it comes to the money, research and medication interests lead the funding streams, while sexual, ethnic and racial populations fight and scramble over pre-plated agendas. This is why I say more people in the United States are following the Mayan calendar than care about the benefits of behavior change, cooperation and inclusion when addressing the fights of HIV and AIDS. We have done well in sharing our knowledge within our population groups and playtime interests, yet seemingly we remain lost in establishing partnerships across cultural, political and economic lines. When it comes to HIV/AIDS, almost everyone seems to like sticking to their familiar corners, familiar habits and down-home sensibilities… read: denials of common interests.

# testing makes us STRONGER



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CDC

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ACT against AIDS

## BLACK MEN FOR CHANGE

continued from page 20

I had the opportunity to sit down and have a conversation with Cleo Manago about why Washington, D.C. hadn't yet been exposed to BMX and its unique method of changing lives. I believed that D.C. could greatly benefit from its principles and positive affirmations. Cleo responded by challenging me to start a chapter here in D.C. He believed if I felt that strongly about it, why not do something about it? I was so excited after that meeting because I felt I was actually applying some of its philosophy firsthand, and I wanted to share it with others.

***SWERV: What has BMX done for you personally?***

**KS:** Upon fully understanding BMX's philosophy and discovering realism in today's world, [I learned] it's a tangible tool effectively put to use by changing the way I viewed or described myself and my fellow peers. Although educated and knowledgeable to a degree, I still needed a personality change myself. I actually started applying the methodology sufficient to bring about that change. This "spiritual experience" or "spiritual awakening" is groundbreaking!

I used it as an intervention to the way I culturally thought about black people and myself. Many [SGL] people have concluded that in order to recover from some of the myths we were taught we must acquire an immediate overwhelming overhaul of "consciousness" followed by cultural affirmation, because some messages are so deep-rooted. What often takes place for some in a few months for me changed almost instantaneously because of my willingness and self-determination.

***SWERV: What will BMX provide for Washington, D.C.?***

**KS:** BMX will provide a group discussion forum on a weekly basis to discuss topics that concern us as same-gender loving African-American men in a safe, affirming space. Some of the topics include "Masculinity vs. femininity: We are all men"; "Relationships: Do I want a boyfriend or a husband?"; "Do we value our lives differently as SGL brothers?"; "Gender role confusion: Adopting the hetero-normative gender role-play within same-gender loving relationships"; "Defining top, bottom and versatile" and "New rites of passage specifically designed for SGL youth."

We are discussing working with Us Helping Us to work with their new empowerment program designed to uplift and empower our young people, ages 18-29. I also recently met with the DC Coalition of Black Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People during a one-day revitalization retreat to collaborate with them to breathe new life into their mission and vision.

As you can see, BMX has plenty in store for The District. I listen carefully to what people share with me and I find that men in D.C. are seeking positive outlets that will benefit them in the long run. BMX is more than willing to be that source of positivity.

## BOSTON'S OTHER CLUB SCENE

continued from page 12

A complete list of the books HBGC has explored to date:

*Boston Boy's Club* (Johnny Diaz)

*Epiphany: Poems in the Key of Love* (Uriah Bell)

*does your mama know: An Anthology of Black Lesbian Coming Out Stories* (Lisa C. Moore, ed.)

*I'm on My Way* (Christopher David)

*If Loving Two Is Wrong* (Kim Beverly)

*Virgins, Guerillas and Locas: Gay Latino Writings about Love* (Jaime Cortez, ed.)

*Unlovable* (Byron Jamal)

*Honey, Honey, Miss Thang: Being Black, Gay and on the Streets* (Leon Pettiway)

*The Day I Stopped Being Pretty* (Rodney Lofton)

*Erzulie's Skirt* (Ana-Maurine Lara)

*The Hairdresser of Harare* (Tendai Huchu)

*Ready to Male* (Lamar Ariel)

*Beantown Cubans* (Johnny Diaz)

*Deepest Desire* (Anne Shade)

*Strapped* (Sharon D. Smith)

*To Be Loved: Because it Was Forbidden* (J.R. Deweese)

*Hiding in Hip Hop: On the Down Low in the Entertainment Industry* (Terrance Dean)

*Love Won't Let Me Be Silent* (Terry Angel Mason)

*Passion Marks* (Lee Hayes)

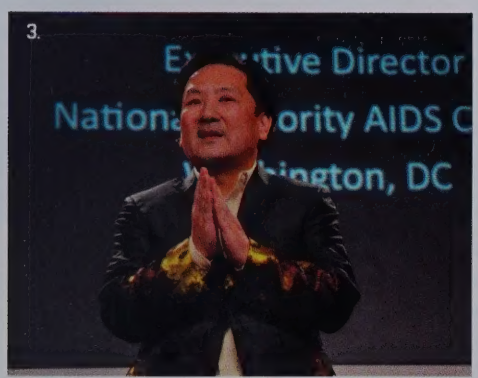
*Never Dead* (Jumata Emill Jones)

For more information about the HBGC book club, visit www.hbgc-boston.org and www.facebook/hbgcboston.

# ON THE SCENE

**More than 3,000 people gathered in Chicago on November 10-13 for the 2011 United States Conference on AIDS (USCA). This annual meeting is coordinated by the National Minority AIDS Council every year to increase the strength and diversity of the community-based response to the AIDS epidemic through education, training, new partnerships, collaboration and networking. It is the largest AIDS-related gathering of its kind. The theme for this year was "Make Change Real: Unite. Speak. Act." Gay and bisexual men were the target population this year, in response to the latest statistics regarding the high numbers of infections within this community.**

*1. CNN anchor Don Lemon. 2. Singer Jennifer Holiday performing at luncheon. 3. National Minority AIDS Coalition executive director Paul Kwata. 4. AIDS czar Jeff Crowley (r), director of the National AIDS Policy. 5. Actress Vanessa Williams speaking at the Sisterlove luncheon. 6. Choir performance at spiritual service. 7. C. Virginia Fields facilitates black women's panel.*



**January 17-18, 2012**
**The Black Gay Research Group (BGRG) Research Summit and 10th Anniversary Celebration**
**New Orleans, LA**
**www.thebgrg.org**
The theme: Designing a Decade: A New Agenda for Black Gay Research and Practice. The summit and anniversary celebration will highlight the scholarly and creative/artistic contributions of those who study the lives of black gay men from a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives.

**January 19-22, 2012**
**National African American MSM Leadership Conference on HIV/AIDS and Other Health Disparities**
**New Orleans, LA**
**www.naesm.org/**
"Forward Together—Engaging Our Future Leaders" is our charge! During the 2012 conference, there will be a renewed sense of unity and commitment to progress in spite of our past challenges. There is strength in our diversity and we have seen that we, as a community, are a powerful force to be reckoned with.

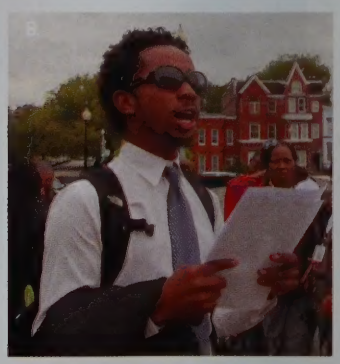
**January 25-29, 2012**
**Creating Change: The National Conference on LGBT Equality**
**Baltimore, MD**
**www.creatingchange.org**
An annual skills-building event for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and their allies held by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. The five-day program features over 250 workshops and training sessions, four plenary sessions, and a variety of networking opportunities.

**February 7, 2012**
**National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**
**www.blackaidsday.org**
A national HIV testing and treatment community mobilization initiative targeted at black people in the U.S. and throughout the diaspora.

**February 11, 2012**
**The Winter Ball**
**Durham, NC**
**www.triangleblackpride.org/?cat=4**
Presented by Shades of Pride. Held at the Hayti Heritage Center, 804 Old Fayetteville St. 8:00 p.m. until 12:30 a.m. Tickets availabe online. $20/$35 per couple.

# ON THE SCENE

**National Black Justice Coalition held its second annual OUT on the Hill Black LGBT Leadership Summit in Washington, D.C. September 20-25, 2011 during Congressional Black Caucus week. This unique gathering included the nation's preeminent black LGBT activists, thought leaders, elected officials, faith leaders and youth to participate in briefings with the Obama Administration, congressional leaders and federal agency officials.** *1. Phill Wilson, founder and executive director, Black AIDS Institute; Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks, executive director, National Black Justice Coalition; Keith Boykin, editor of* The Daily Voice. *2. Darryl Moore, NBJC board chairman; Sharon J. Lettman-Hicks; Phill Wilson; Mandy Carter, NBJC founder; Valerie Spencer, founder/director Transcend Empowerment Institute; Kylar Broadus, NBJC board member. 3. Je-Shawnna Wholley, grassroots activist/community organizer, Spelman College; Lauren Waters, diversity student assistant, Human Rights Campaign at the Black LGBT National Town Hall Meeting. 4. LGBT youth at Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Issue Forum. 5. Leslye Huff, NBJC board member; Rev. Dr. Jamie Washington, president and founder, Washington Consulting Group; Rev. Darlene Nipper, deputy executive director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. 6.NBJC's senior fellow, Rodney K. Nickens, Jr., making final preparations with OUT on the Hill participants for a full day of lobbying visits with congressional offices.*



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—**Jewelle Gomez**, *author of The Gilda Stories*

Our Name Be Witness is about the women poet Marvin K. White came from, mostly gone now but whose spirited voices challenged, begged, egged and demanded that they have their say. Part mother-tongue and part fortune-tale, White speaks the truth of these women and all things spirit, legacy, memory, men, failings, successes, discovery and love that they were. This work is a cup to the wall of their secrets that were held and let go of in dreams, in wake, in life and in afterlife.

Status is a collection of commiserations, wisdoms, placeholders, remembrances, lessons, guiding principles, wives' tales, riddles, puns, purges, time management tools and helpful hints. It is an amalgamation of reiterations, recipes, spells and spits. There are half-meditations, fortunes, factoids and foibles. There are spills and freezes. This representation is full of forget-me-nots, deciphers, misfires and strikes. Somewhere between poem prompt and punditry lies Pithos, the quip, the quick, the truth, an emergent poetic form: the Facebook status.

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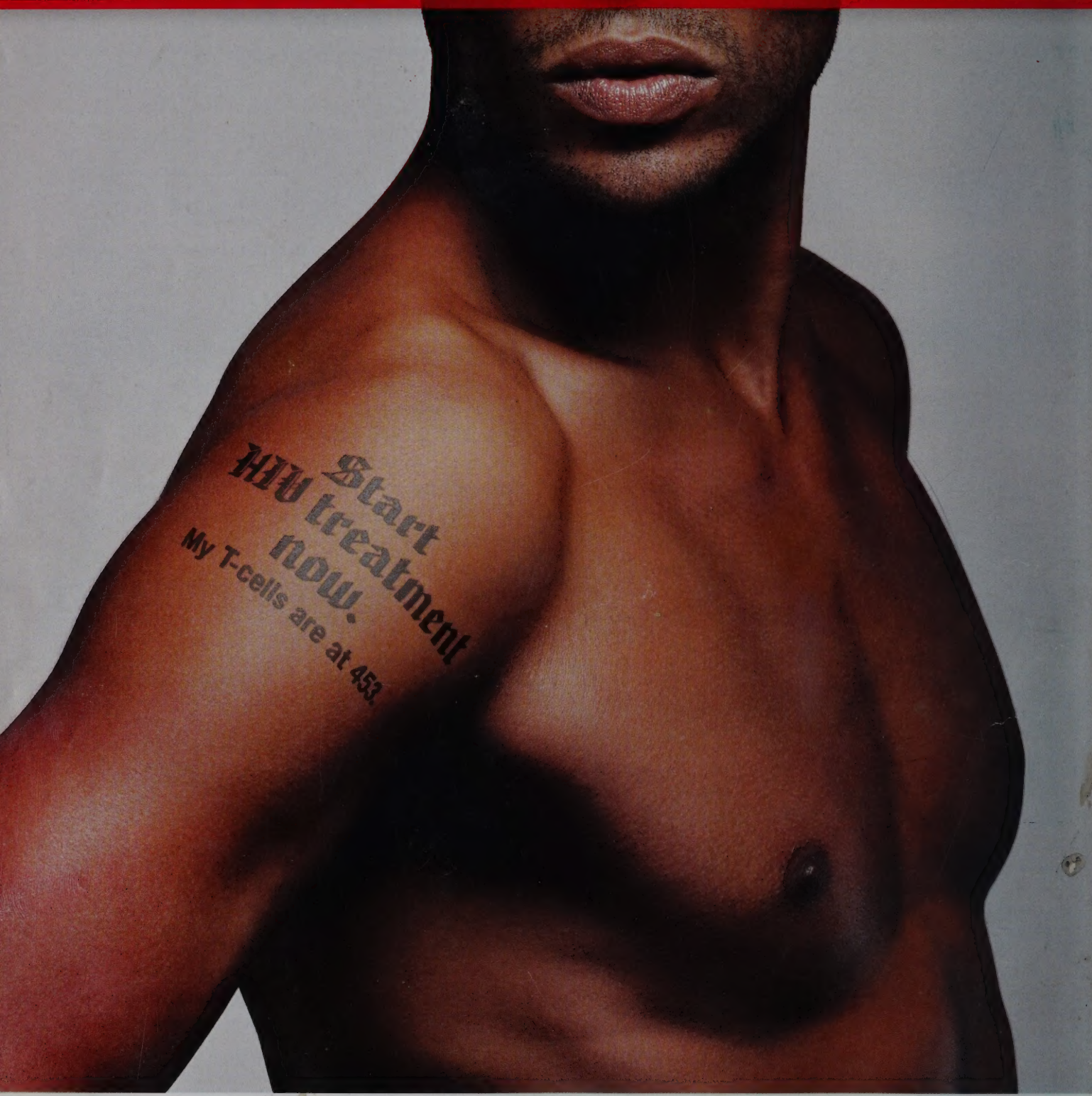


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HIV treatment is now recommended for everyone with a T-cell count of 500 or less and should be considered when T-cells are higher than 500, according to the DHHS* and the IAS-USA†, along with other factors. Starting treatment early may help protect your immune system and vital organs. Today's medicines may have fewer, more manageable side effects. They may help you live a longer, healthier life. Receive helpful information about living with HIV that you should know. Call toll free 1-888-447-1826, or visit **TREATHIVNOW.COM**.

*DHHS = Department of Health and Human Services †IAS-USA = International AIDS Society USA. ©2011 Gilead Sciences, Inc. All rights reserved. UN7534 03/11

# swerv

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SUMMER 2011

## SUMMER SWIMSUIT ISSUE

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH TOMMY BENNETT

AUTHOR
## LEE HAYES

BIG BROTHER'S
## MARCELLAS REYNOLDS

COUNCILMAN
## DARRYL MOORE

R&B SINGER
## RAHSAAN PATTERSON

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A DC study of 500 gay men found that the HIV infection rate among Black gay men 30 years and older was 32% and the rate for men less than 30 was 12%. Sexually active Black gay men in the District should get a HIV test at least three (3) times a year.

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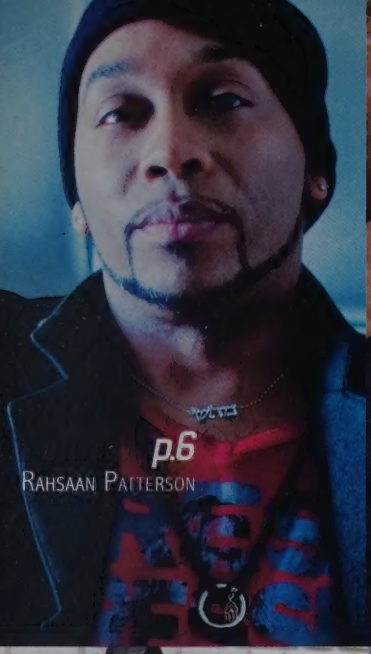


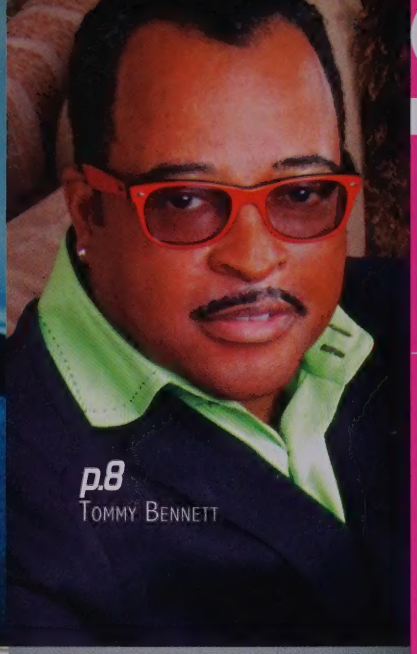

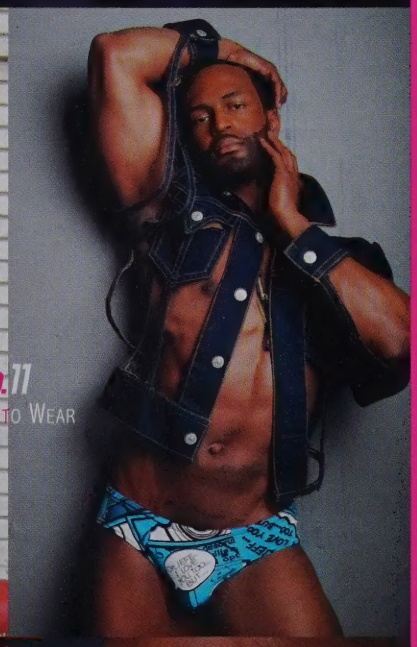

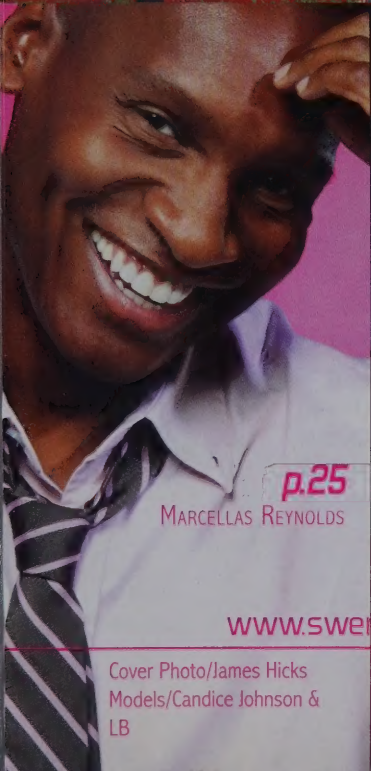


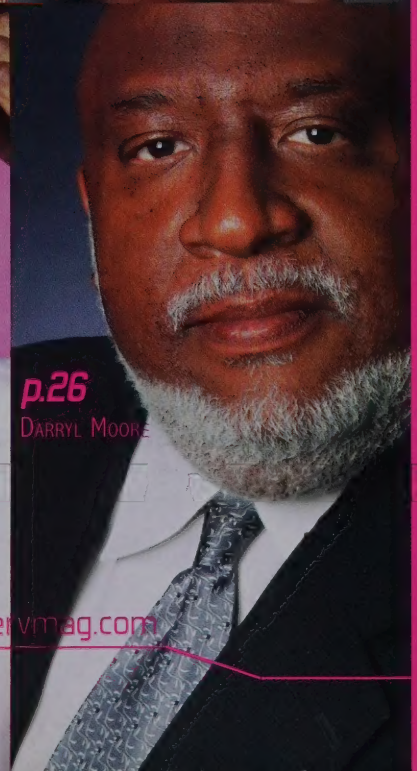


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SWERV

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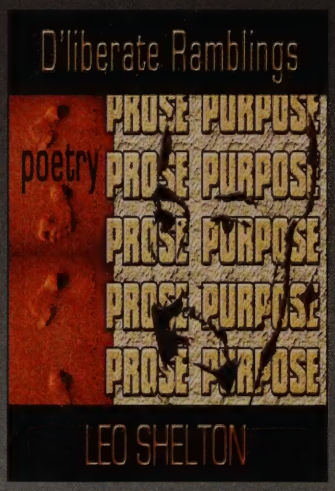


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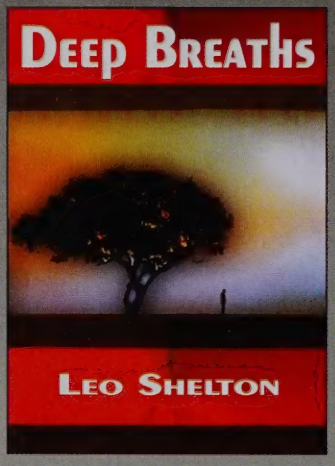


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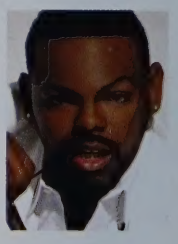
L. Michael Gipson is an Oakland-based cultural critic, community health planner and award-winning youth advocate. His sociopolitical essays have been published in two anthologies, including *Poverty & Race in America: The Emerging Agendas* (Chester Hartman, ed.). As a cultural critic and music journalist, Gipson's work has appeared in *Clik*, *Pulse*, *Arise*, *Pride*, *Amplify*, *Urban Dialect*, *Port of Harlem* and *Creative Loafing ATL*. He is editor and columnist at www.SoulTracks.com and heard weekly as "Cornfed" on *The Dave Brown Radio Show*.

James Hicks' passion for photography began while attending Morehouse College. After his return to Washington, D.C., he assisted local photographers before beginning his own freelance career. Hicks was a frequent contributor to the *Baltimore Sun*, and shot ad campaigns for local and national stores and clothing companies. His move to New York City expanded his photography credits to celebrities such as Smokey Robinson, Pam Grier, Sister Sledge, Alicia Keys, Erykah Badu, Usher and Diddy. Hicks' current endeavor is a coffee table book featuring female impersonators, *Drag Dolls, Dames & Divas*.



Washington, D.C. native Yardé Noir began Genesys Productions before graduating from Duke Ellington School of the Arts in 1997. Noir went on to Bennett Career Institute majoring in hair and make-up, lending his talents as an experienced cosmetologist. Noir has worked as a make-up artist for Smashbox Cosmetics and Pretty by PR, and sits on the artistic team for Joya Cosmetics. Noir is the 2008 Elite Beauty Make-Up Competition Winner. Noir also attended the Art Institute of Washington majoring in graphic design and is currently pursuing a master educator's license.

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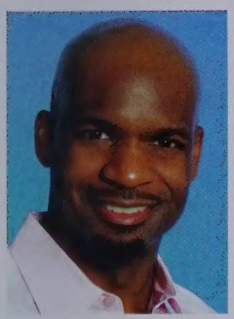

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# From the Editor

Summertime is here once again which means it's time for the *SWERV* summer swimsuit issue! This year we have our biggest spread ever; eight pages of hot swimsuit couture styled by newcomer Sieje for Steel Sharpen Steel, photographed by celebrity photographer James Hicks with our own Yardé Noir on hair and makeup. Sieje has taken swimwear out of the water and onto the runway, creating fantastic outfits out of bathing attire.

Also gracing the pages of this issue is the remarkably talented R&B singer Rahsaan Patterson. Patterson has been in the business for nearly three decades, starting out as a child on *Kids Incorporated* and going on to become one of the most respected voices in contemporary black music. Patterson talks to L. Michael Gipson about his career and being out in the music world.

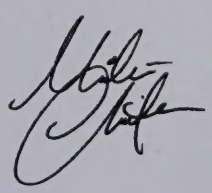
I had the pleasure of interviewing an old friend and colleague, author Lee Hayes, who is releasing a new book this summer, *The Bad Seed.* Just like his prior works, *Passion Marks* and *The Messiah*, his new novel is sure to be a thrilling read.

Radio personality and former PUSH employee Tommy Bennett finally says "enough is enough": he gives *SWERV* the exclusive scoop on his discrimination and sexual harrassment lawsuit against Rev. Jesse Jackson.

We also hear from *Big Brother* star, celebrity stylist Marcellas Reynolds; National Black Justice Coalition's Darryl Moore; and Sundiata Alayé teaches us a touching lesson about love and safer sex.

So grab a chair on the porch, get some sweet tea and enjoy the summer issue. Stay cool!

Michael-Christopher
Editor-in-Chief



# REVEALING RAHSAAN

Words/L. Michael Gipson

*Rahsaan Patterson. This maturing hipster with the hooded eyes, pleasingly thick physique and caramel dome has undergone various public iterations, yet has maintained a consistent, groundbreaking presence for over 27 years. From his TV beginnings in 1984 as "The Kid," the lone black character on the pre-*Glee *musical phenomenon* Kids Incorporated*; to his cult classic 1997 MCA Records self-titled debut; to his wild-haired, disquietingly androgynous presence on R&B and jazz stages across the globe... Patterson has broken industry barriers by simply being himself.*

*He was once a hit maker with writing and producing partners Jamey Jaz and Keith Crouch for stars like Brandy and Tevin Campbell; he's also got five albums of his own under his belt, soon to be six. Patterson can still command respectable five-figure bookings and pack a 2,000-seat theater in big cities some 11 years since leaving the major label scene. Now an entrepreneur with a partnership stake in his independent record label, a member of the international soul group SugaRush Beat Company, and a living legend among fans and indie artists for never compromising his image or music, Patterson has grown in stature and industry credibility on the eve of his much-anticipated* Bleuphoria *release.*

*Rahsaan Patterson is a powerful presence of a man. When meeting the singer whose liberated onstage presence once made grown men squirm in their seats, one is surprised to hear a natural baritone that belies Patterson's sky-scraping tenor. Now more likely to be seen rocking stages in trend-setting boots, jeans and a plaid shirt or red velvet jacket than a stylist's costume, Patterson strikes a less ostentatious presentation with age. The conservative, deeply spiritual and recently "more out" Patterson has ironically managed of late to deepen his profile as a public enigma. Cracking the private star's inner world to peek at the man beneath the label-defying persona can be a feat, but worth a try.*

***SWERV: I remember watching you play "The Kid" on* Kids Incorporated *and loving seeing my reflection staring and singing back at me from the screen. Tell us what it meant to be the only black boy on the '80s version of* Glee*?***
**Rahsaan Patterson:** I didn't get the magnitude of having that role until I was about 30 years old. During the period where I was playing "The Kid," I didn't focus on being the only black boy. I was so happy expressing myself creatively, and happy being amongst other talented kids, that I overlooked the significance of being one of the few young black males represented on TV during those days.

***SWERV: After that first taste of making money as a performer, was any other profession a consideration?***
**RP:** Not then. But now is a different story.

***SWERV: What other profession would you consider?***
**RP:** Painting. I started taking fine art classes and am very much looking forward to growing and learning in that medium.

***SWERV: How did you beat the child star curse of drug addiction, poverty and becoming tabloid fodder?***
**RP:** I wouldn't say I beat the curse entirely. The effects of being a child "star" are unimaginable to those who know nothing of the experience. I'll say I'm blessed and humbled to have family and friends who are here through the good and the bad times, full of unconditional love.

***SWERV: When I met and spent time with you early in your career, I would have described you as shy and perhaps self-protective. Recent encounters with you have revealed to me a bolder, more assertive man. How have you seen yourself change and grow since you first got signed to MCA in '97?***
**RP:** In the same ways you just described. The assertiveness and boldness comes from having the now 27 years experience in the entertainment industry. It comes from growing securely into my manhood and artistry, without apology and without concern for what anyone else thinks, especially those who don't know me personally.

***SWERV: How has your evolution as a man changed what you musically write about and does what you write differ when writing for others?***
**RP:** What inspires me today to write is the same as what inspired my writing years ago, and that's my personal experience. I suppose the assertiveness has been displayed in song more with each album. Overall, the musical growth and evolution coincides with my personal growth and evolution, as it should. What I write for others specifically definitely differs. It's necessary to articulate what that artist wants to say by including them in the writing process.

***SWERV: When they hit, what did writing Brandy's "Baby" and Tevin Campbell's "Back to the World" mean to you personally and how did that early success shape your career?***
**RP:** Writing those songs gave me the chance to further make a name for myself in the record industry. At the point those songs were released, my own demos garnered interest from record companies. The success of "Baby" and "Back to the World" cemented that I might be worth the investment if a record company signed me to write and record my own album.

***SWERV: Are you still in touch with Tevin Campbell or know how he's doing?***
**RP:** I am not in touch with Tevin. I can count on one hand the times we were around each other. Because of the Internet, I'm aware that he's been on Broadway and he enjoys it.

***SWERV: From your self-titled debut to your forthcoming summer release,* Bleuphoria*, each project has its own musical DNA. What's the DNA for* Bleuphoria *and how does it differ from your earlier works?***
**RP:** The *Bleuphoria* DNA consists of galactic elements and insight, much more than any of my previous albums, except for *The Ultimate Gift*. Sonically and spiritually, I believe Bleuphoria picks up where *The Ultimate Gift* left off, minus the holiday/Christmas motif.

***SWERV: Spirituality is a recurring theme in your lyrics. What role does spirituality and religion play in your life and work?***
**RP:** Spirituality is the basis for all my work. Breaking out of the bondage of religious views and stereotypes is my intent.

***SWERV: Musically, do you consider yourself a traditionalist or a boundary-breaker in your approach to R&B/soul?***
**RP:** The latter.

***SWERV: Given how much the genre has changed in the mainstream imagination, do you still even consider yourself an R&B or soul artist? Why or why not?***
**RP:** I consider myself an artist. One who is capable of crossing genres, blending or bending them. Why? Because that's what I do. The artists who've inspired

*[continued on page 19]*

# BROTH
# EXCLUSIVE I

Words/Sundiata Alayé
Photo/James Hicks

*There's so much more than meets the eye when it comes to Tommy R. Bennett. "Aruba Tommy," as he's known from his role on the* Tom Joyner Morning Show, *is serious about his business. Bennett has been a nursing home administrator (for over 20 years), a radio personality, community organizer and political dynamo. He's served on the board of Ryan White Title I Services in Hampton Roads, Va. He was the field director for Hampton Roads and Newport News, Va. for Tim Kaine's campaign for governor. He served on Mark Warner's campaign for governor of Virginia, and his successful bid for Senate. He also served on the national LGBT Leadership Council for the campaign to elect President Barrack Obama.*

*Most recently, Bennett was national director of community affairs for Rainbow PUSH Coalition. For those who may have missed it, Tommy Bennett filed a lawsuit in July 2010 against Rev. Jesse Jackson and the Rainbow PUSH Coalition on the grounds that he was harassed and terminated from his position on the basis of his sexual orientation.* Windy City Times *published a story in April 2011, and Bennett has since been bombarded with interview requests from the media, including* Good Morning America, *the* Today Show, *the* New York Post, NBC News *and* MSNBC, *and even the* National Enquirer. Bennett *agreed to an exclusive interview with* SWERV.

***SWERV: Thank you for taking the time to discuss this with us. I know you've been bombarded with interview requests and even offered money to discuss your case. Why us?***
***Tommy Bennett:*** Your magazine reaches the larger black GLBT population. I find it a professional and honest publication that I know will tell the true story without sensationalism.

***SWERV: Thank you. From what we've read from your complaint, you were actually laid off from the Rainbow PUSH coalition due to lack of funding on December 23, 2009. Why are you now just telling your story?***
**TB:** It is true that I was laid off on December 23, 2009, but my problems actually began in 2008 when I filed a formal complaint with the HR department of PUSH. I filed a formal complaint with the Chicago Commission on Human Relations early in 2010. The story didn't get picked up until about March or April of this year, but it's been in progress for a while.

***SWERV: What did your complaint allege?***
**TB:** Sexual harassment and discrimination. I filed a complaint against one of my employees who during a staff meeting stood up to lead the morning prayer and asked in her prayer that "all of the homosexual spirits in the organization be bound and moved out of the organization." Shortly after, she would harass me in the halls by flashing a limp wrist when saying good morning and all other kinds of foolishness. She then requested a transfer from my department because she didn't want a "gay supervisor." Her request was granted almost immediately. I've yet to hear from our HR department about my complaint.

***SWERV: What was the outcome of the HR investigation?***
**TB:** To date, I've yet to hear from our HR department about my complaint. That was 2008. It's now 2011.

***SWERV: How were you treated in the organization following your complaint?***
**TB:** Well, there was a clique of church folk in the organization who pretty much

# ER OUTSIDER:
# TERVIEW WITH TOMMY BENNETT

mocked me and ostracized me. It's not easy being openly gay in a historically black civil rights organization. I had dealt with all kinds of issues all of my life regarding my sexuality. But here I was in a civil rights organization dealing with the same kinds of issues. I wrongly believed that there would be at least some protections for me.

***SWERV: Why didn't you just leave?***
**TB:** For a couple of reasons. First, I wasn't interested in backing down, and I believed I had a larger responsibility in my role at PUSH. There were and still are a lot of people in need, and my work as the national director of community affairs spoke for itself. I was responsible for voter registration, the legal clinic, helping families in foreclosure, initiating investigations for police brutality complaints, families who lost their children to violence, and even harassment suits. My contributions to the organization and to the community could not be ignored, but my complaints were. The harassment didn't stop, and then in the spring of 2008, I was told that I would have to act as Rev. Jackson's travel assistant following the resignation of his former assistant. I was told it would be a couple of weeks, but I ended up acting in that role in addition to my other responsibilities. It was during that time that things seemed to get progressively worse.

***SWERV: How so?***
**TB:** In addition to my primary responsibilities, I had to travel with Rev. Jackson, but I was responsible for packing his clothes, running personal errands, handling his luggage, airport check-ins, transportation and things like that. I was also expected to escort women to hotel rooms to meet Jackson—and then clean up afterward. It was humiliating. I did that for over a year before I was pulled off in February 2009.

***SWERV: What do you mean, "pulled off"?***
**TB:** Well, sometime in January or February of 2009, an anonymous letter was sent to Rev. Jackson's family alleging that he was having an affair. Rev. Jackson accused me of writing the letter. I was questioned about it by the chairman of the board of PUSH, the chief of staff who told me that the letter was sent from a Kinko's and they were having surveillance tapes pulled from the store and I should just admit it before the case was turned over to the FBI and other federal authorities. I told them to do whatever they needed to do because the bottom line is I don't give a damn about who he sleeps with! That's when the harassment and retaliation really started. Rev. Jackson was very angry with me.

***SWERV: For example?***
**TB:** I was pushed to the side and not included in organizational activities and decisions as I once had been. I remember, too, when we were in the middle of planning for our national convention, I requested an LGBT table and a panel discussion. Rev. Jackson flat out denied it, and in the planning meeting said that homosexuality is not a part of his program, and that there would be no LGBT table, panel, discussion or booth. I responded by saying that you will use me to plan the convention but not allow me to sit at the main table? Now I know how Bayard Rustin must have felt. Shortly after, in May of 2009, I was placed on administrative leave with pay.

***SWERV: What was the basis?***
**TB:** I was accused of taking an intern out to a gay bar with some friends of mine on his last day of employment and smoking weed with him, both of which was against "policy," I was told. However, they conducted an investigation, I submitted to a drug test—which I passed—and that was that.

***SWERV: When were you presented with the results of the investigation?***
**TB:** I wasn't. In December of 2009, I received a letter from the organization via FedEx that I was being laid off due to organizational funding issues.

***SWERV: Did you believe that?***
**TB:** Hell, no! The organization had plenty of money. Don't forget I've been in meetings with Rev. Jackson during fundraising campaigns. I know the funds the organization raises. In addition, shortly after I was laid off, someone was hired in my position.

***SWERV: Is that when you decided to file a suit outside of the organization?***
**TB:** Yes, it was. Following the Christmas holidays, I started my research and started by going to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to file a complaint. They couldn't help me. It was the first time that I realized that there were no federal protections for GLBT men and women in the workplace. I then contacted the Lambda Legal Defense Fund [www.lambdalegal.org], who provided no relief as they usually take on larger class action suits. Ironically, weeks later I was contacted by the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, who were interested in me joining their board of directors. I took that opportunity to discuss my case with the chairman of the board of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, who took on my case in February 2010.

***SWERV: What are you hoping to gain from this complaint?***
**TB:** I'm asking for back pay from December 2009, my COBRA health insurance and emotional distress. On a larger scale, however, what I am hoping for is to bring much needed attention to that fact that LGBT [people] have no federal protections. I am looking for federal laws. Though this issue affects all LGBT [people], it's especially stressful for black people. In the black community we are being bullied in the community, in church and at work. There are a lot of us who are depressed, stressed and feel the pressure more than others. We need forums in the community with conversation around this, but we need to do more fighting for our rights. There are people out there now who are going through the same things I've experienced, with nowhere to turn. Black people ain't got nobody but Jesus!

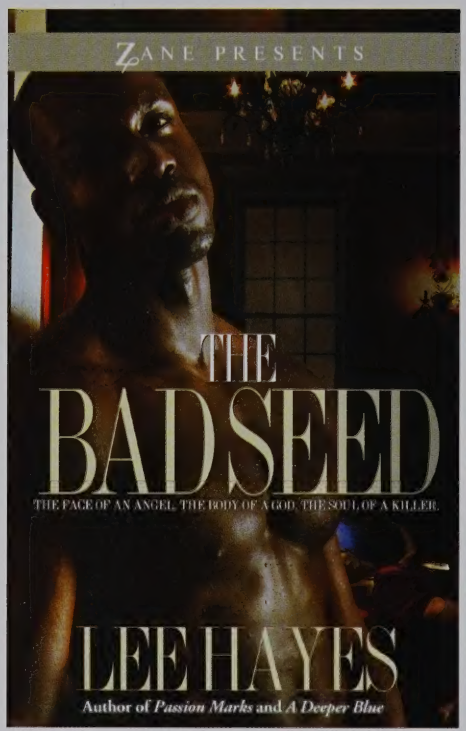
***SWERV: What has this experience taught you most?***
**TB:** Let me put it to you this way. Everybody looks to PUSH as Oz and Rev. Jackson as the wizard. We're all seeking something, whether a healed heart, courage, a new way of thinking or a home—a place to be welcomed and understood. What this experience has taught me is that I didn't need any of those things because they were here with me all the time. The strength and the power has existed in me all along. If you remember the story of the *Wizard of Oz*, you'll remember that the one thing that exposed the wizard was Toto. I am Toto!

S

***Bennett now spends his time volunteering for the National Black Justice Coalition in Washington, D.C.***

# BAD SEED, GOOD GROWTH:
## AN INTERVIEW WITH LEE HAYES

Words/Michael-Christopher


ZANE PRESENTS
THE
BAD SEED
THE FACE OF AN ANGEL. THE BODY OF A GOD. THE SOUL OF A KILLER.
LEE HAYES
Author of Passion Marks and A Deeper Blue

*Back in 1999 I made the decision to move from The Big Apple to the Chocolate City. A good friend of mine, Robert, played an integral part in helping me get settled into my new home by sharing his with me. In those first few months he and his friends showed me the ropes as we hit D.C.'s hot spots of the early 2000s. A few years later, while I was working on my second* Living the Life *prequel and had published five issues of the comic, one of those friends sent me the first chapter of a novel he was working on. The chapter was incredibly detailed, explicitly thorough and, most of all, intensely moving. That chapter turned out to be the beginning of* Passion Marks *as well as a new chapter in the life and budding writing career of author Lee Hayes. Since then Hayes has written* A Deeper Blue: Passion Marks II *and* The Messiah, *edited* Flesh to Flesh, *and most recently published* The Bad Seed *(Strebor Books, June 2011). I sat down with my old friend and colleague to catch up and talk a little shop.*

***SWERV: Lee, you have a new book titled* The Bad Seed. *What's the story about?***
**Lee Hayes:** Yes, I have a new book that I'm really excited about. It's my first published work since 2008, when *Flesh to Flesh* was released. *The Bad Seed* is a crazy and exciting novel that puts a wicked spin on a couple of risqué themes. In the story "I Guess That's Why They Call It the Blues," a beautiful but damaged young man marries a wealthy older man for the money. Not long after the wedding, he begins an illicit affair with his husband's attorney and they begin to plot the death of the old man. "Crazy in Love" tells the story of a 17-year-old high school boy who develops a fatalistic crush on his reclusive English teacher. When the teacher rebuffs the boy's advances, all hell breaks loose—and the upstanding teacher's career is on the line. Hell hath no fury… I've wanted to write a story like this for a long time.

***SWERV: So* The Bad Seed *is actually two stories? Are they at all intertwined? You said you've wanted to "write a story like this for a long time." What kind of story is that?***
**LH:** Yes, *The Bad Seed* consists of two novellas. Each story really showcases the bad qualities that live in each of us, whether it's greed, lust, anger or violence. These emotions, if not kept at bay, can lead to misery and pain for us and for others. These stories are definitely for the grown and sexy because they show us in our most depraved states. In real life, you wouldn't want to meet either one of the main characters, but they make for a juicy read.

We all know that in life, sometimes the bad guy does, in fact, win, even if he has to lie, cheat and kill his way to victory. I wanted to write about that. No fairy tale endings here.

***SWERV: Your work is very insightful and often draws from situations we all could find ourselves in at one point or another. What influenced you when writing* The Bad Seed?**
**LH:** Life is really my biggest influence. In order to make stories exciting, I think writers have to be able to recognize those things that happen in real life and be able to build a story around them. The truth is indeed stranger than fiction. Often I'll read something or see something and think "that's a cool idea," and then determine if I can make a story out of it, adding my particular flair and ideas.

When I was writing *The Bad Seed* I wanted to explore a couple of themes that we've seen before in books or movies and put a hot, gay spin on it. With the first story, I wanted to delve into the issue of gay marriage and inheritance. There are thousands of movies and books dealing with heterosexual couples getting married in which one plots the death of the other for money. Now, with gay marriage finally taking root in the country, it's an issue that gay married couples will face one day, I'm sure. With the second story, we've seen a lot of recent news stories of female teachers seducing their adolescent male students or movies where the female student becomes fatalistically attracted to one of her male teachers. I started thinking how interesting it would be if a male student harbored that same intense attraction to one of his male teachers. How would that play out?

***SWERV: With that in mind, what classic story from any medium (film, television or stage) would you like to see, or write, a gay adaptation for?***
**LH:** I'm not sure that I have a particular movie or story in mind, but I am a big horror movie fan and I think we could use a lot more gay horror stories. Can you imagine if Freddy or Jason was gay? How about a good gay ghost story?

***SWERV: I was wondering if you were a horror fan, given the very graphic and gruesome opening to* The Bad Seed. *What about horror fascinates you?***
**LH:** I don't like gory stuff, but I do love a good scare. Horror fascinates me, particularly supernatural stuff, but when it's done well it can really take your breath away and get your adrenaline pumping. *The Bad Seed* isn't horror, but the opening scene is pretty graphic and sets the tone for the novel.

***SWERV: Now, we go back a ways; in fact, back to my first days in Washington, D.C. I was writing then, but I had no idea that you were interested in writing. When did you get the writing bug and how did you develop your craft before your debut* Passion Marks?**
**LH:** Yes, we go back a long time. I moved to DC in 1998 from Texas and I met you shortly thereafter. And most people don't know that you designed the original cover of *Passion Marks*!

[continued on page 24]

# READY TO WEAR

**Come to the pool in style! Why just put on a swimsuit when you can have a whole swim ensemble? With a little imagination, and lots of attitude, your bathing suit can become an outfit for any occasion!**

Cotton candy color block swimsuit

4" honey rattan beaded earrings by Mzuri Sana

Photos/
James Hicks

Styling & Wardrobe/Sieje
for Steel Sharpen Steel

Hair & Makeup/
Yardé Noir

Earrings/Nubian Hueman
www.nubianhueman.com
&
Mzuri Sana

Yellow and black abstract print swimsuit with black stretch patent leather band. Tyrell Collection

Nubian Hueman signature beaded 9" feather earrings

Vintage '80s striped sheer mesh swimsuit

Nubian Hueman 3" suede beaded earrings

Sahara floral and
seashell swimsuit

Nubian Hueman signature 7"
beaded feather vintage
seashell earrings

Photos/
James Hicks

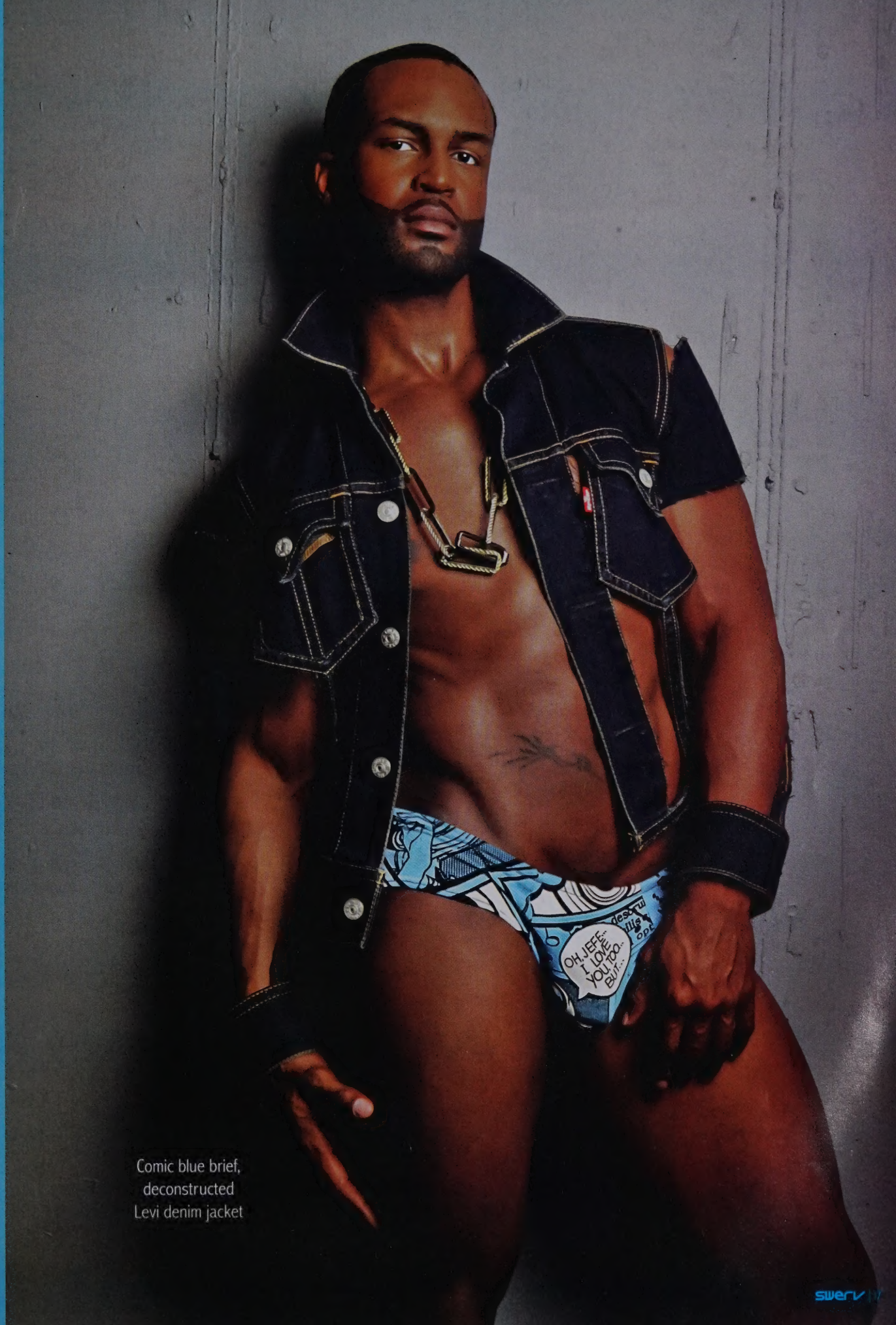
Men's designs/Noral2010
www.noral2010.com

Styling/Sieje
for Steel Sharpen Steel

Hair & Makeup/
Yardé Noir

Summer blossom brief

'80s paint splatter brief.




Comic blue brief,
deconstructed
Levi denim jacket

Reflective onyx brief,
retro-futurism vest
by Transient

[continued from page 7]

me most have all done just that. They taught me that it was OK to do. Actually, that it was the right thing to do.

***SWERV: At this point in your career, is it easier or harder for you to get radio support for your new music?***
**RP:** It seems about the same to some degree; but at any given moment that all could change, for better or worse.

***SWERV: You've been signed to a major label and you've been an independent artist. What have been the best and worst of both experiences for you?***
**RP:** The major label experience comes with much more financial backing and employees in the various departments to get the job done. That part, I guess, is a "plus," so to speak. The downside, I'll say, was that there was always a committee of opinions, which led to uncertainty. That uncertainty may have very well effected the execution and impacted the end result. The best and worst as far as indie? Well, I've found that my indie experience has produced a similar result as having been on a major [label].

***SWERV: Is there an album you have made that you wish had a broader audience or considered it to be the quintessential Rahsaan Patterson project?***
**RP:** I believe all of my albums are the quintessential Rahsaan project. Honestly. I wish all my albums had a broader audience. However, I'm aware that those projects reached people it was meant for and will reach others in the future when it is time.

***SWERV: On* Bleuphoria*, you work with Faith Evans, Jody Watley, Tata Vega, Shanice Wilson, and the legendary Andrae Crouch. What impressed you most about working with these talents?***
**RP:** That they were willing to [do it]. And gave of their time and talent to contribute to making this project what it is. I'm honored.

***SWERV: I'm going to name some names and you tell me what these folks have meant to you in your life and career, starting with one of your best friends, R&B and jazz singer Lalah Hathaway.***
**RP:** The ring around my Saturn.

***SWERV: Producers Keith Crouch and Jamey Jaz.***
**RP:** The brothers I never had, fighting and all.

***SWERV: Ledisi and Rachelle Ferrell.***
**RP:** My cosmic sisters.

***SWERV: Van Hunt.***
**RP:** That classmate who ended up in detention with me.

***SWERV: Your parents.***
**RP:** My reason.

***SWERV: Chaka Khan.***
**RP:** Mentor.

***SWERV: Rahsaan Patterson.***
**RP:** My hero.

***SWERV: On stage, in body and expression, you've always been unapologetically yourself. And have said in interviews that you never hid your sexuality. Was there ever any internal or external pressure by you or others (i.e., family, MCA, etc.) to play more the crotch-grabbing R&B lothario audiences expected?***
**RP:** Because it's important for me to be my authentic self, I never took on that pressure. It wasn't an option for me. I believe those who worked with me understood that, which is why they never brought or verbalized it directly to me. As for my family, we are a vibrant, colorful, loving and spiritually rooted bunch of folk, who all walk in our authenticity... so anything other than that was not a thought.

***SWERV: You've seldom used gender cues like "girl" or "my lady" in your work. Was that conscious decision?***
**RP:** Absolutely.

***SWERV: Do you believe you or your career has paid any price for your daring to be exactly who you are?***
**RP:** Certainly.

***SWERV: Last question on this front. You were reported as describing your own childhood molestation as being the reason for your sexuality. Was that accurately reported and, if so, have you ever gotten counseling for that childhood trauma?***
**RP:** My intent was to simply shed light on my personal experience. *My* experience was that at 6 years old I knew nothing of sexuality, but from the moment I was invaded upon in such a way, it altered the course of *my* existence, the nature of my spirit and where my life would have gone had that not happened. Simply. I believe others who've suffered in similar ways from having been abused feel exactly as I do, and if all the gay experts who post, blog and criticize on the Internet disagree or take issue with any of this, so be it. I could give two fucks, quite frankly. But God bless you.

***SWERV: Indeed. You've never had that Terrell Carter tabloid photo moment and appear to be pretty protective of your private life, but since you so often write about love, I've got to ask: What does Rahsaan in love look like and act like?***
**RP:** Rahsaan in love looks and acts just like he sounds and resonates in his music. The jealous and possessive traits show up though... [laughs]

***SWERV: Are you in love now?***
**RP:** T.M.I. [winks]

***SWERV: Last question. What does the love of your fans mean to you some 14 years after your debut?***
**RP:** It gives me encouragement, strength and reason to continue in the musical realm of artistry.

*Look for Rahsaan Patterson's newest release,* Bleuphoria, *due out in July 2011, and keep up with him at www.rahsaan.com.*

# "All my HIV meds in one pill daily. I like that."

Shawn
on ATRIPLA for 2½ years

## ATRIPLA is the #1 prescribed HIV regimen.*

### About ATRIPLA:

- Only ATRIPLA combines 3 HIV medications in 1 pill daily.
- Proven to lower viral load to undetectable† in approximately 7 out of 10 patients new to therapy, and also raise T-cell‡ (CD4+) count to help control HIV through 3 years of a clinical study.§
- **ATRIPLA does not cure HIV-1 and has not been shown to prevent passing HIV-1 to others.**

### Selected Important Safety Information:

Some people who have taken medicine like ATRIPLA have developed the following: **a serious condition of acid buildup in the blood (lactic acidosis),** and **serious liver problems (hepatotoxicity). For patients with both HIV-1 and hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis may suddenly worsen if ATRIPLA is discontinued.**

**Please see detailed and additional Important Safety Information, including the bolded information to the left.**

† Defined as a viral load of less than 400 copies/mL.
‡ Average increase of 312 cells/mm³.
§ In this study, 227 patients took the meds in ATRIPLA.

**Patient model. Individual results may vary.**

**Your doctor may prescribe ATRIPLA alone or with other HIV medications.**

**Talk to your doctor to see if ATRIPLA is right for you.**

**ATRIPLA®**
(efavirenz 600 mg/emtricitabine 200 mg/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate 300 mg) Tablets

**To learn more, visit www.ATRIPLA.com**

* Synovate Healthcare Data; US HIV Monitor, Q1 2010.

# ATRIPLA Important Safety Information and Indication

## INDICATION

ATRIPLA® (efavirenz 600 mg/emtricitabine 200 mg/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate [DF] 300 mg) is a prescription medication used alone as a complete regimen or with other medicines to treat HIV-1 infection in adults.

**ATRIPLA does not cure HIV-1 and has not been shown to prevent passing HIV-1 to others.** The long-term effects of ATRIPLA are not known at this time. People taking ATRIPLA may still get infections that develop because the immune system is weak or other conditions that happen with HIV-1 infection.

**Do not stop taking ATRIPLA unless directed by your healthcare provider. See your healthcare provider regularly.**

## IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION

**Contact your healthcare provider right away if you get the following side effects or conditions associated with ATRIPLA:**

- **Nausea, vomiting, unusual muscle pain, and/or weakness. These may be signs of a buildup of acid in the blood (lactic acidosis), which is a serious medical condition.**
- **Light-colored stools, dark-colored urine, and/or if your skin or the whites of your eyes turn yellow. These may be signs of serious liver problems.**
- **If you have HIV-1 and hepatitis B virus (HBV), your liver disease may suddenly get worse if you stop taking ATRIPLA.**

**Do not take ATRIPLA if you are taking the following medicines because serious and life-threatening side effects may occur when taken together:** Vascor® (bepridil), Propulsid® (cisapride), Versed® (midazolam), Orap® (pimozide), Halcion® (triazolam), or ergot medications (for example, Wigraine® and Cafergot®).

**In addition, ATRIPLA should not be taken with:** Combivir® (lamivudine/zidovudine), EMTRIVA® (emtricitabine), Epivir® or Epivir-HBV® (lamivudine), Epzicom® (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine), SUSTIVA® (efavirenz), Trizivir® (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine/zidovudine), TRUVADA® (emtricitabine/tenofovir DF), or VIREAD® (tenofovir DF), because they contain the same or similar active ingredients as ATRIPLA. ATRIPLA should not be used with HEPSERA® (adefovir dipivoxil).

Vfend® (voriconazole) or REYATAZ® (atazanavir sulfate) with or without Norvir® (ritonavir) should not be taken with ATRIPLA since they may lose their effect and may also increase the chance of having side effects from ATRIPLA. Fortovase® or Invirase® (saquinavir) should not be used as the only protease inhibitor in combination with ATRIPLA.

Taking ATRIPLA with St. John's wort or products containing St. John's wort is not recommended as it may cause decreased levels of ATRIPLA, increased viral load, and possible resistance to ATRIPLA or cross-resistance to other anti-HIV drugs.

**This list of medicines is not complete. Discuss with your healthcare provider all prescription and nonprescription medicines, vitamins, or herbal supplements you are taking or plan to take.**

**Tell your healthcare provider if you:**

- **Are pregnant: Women should not become pregnant while taking ATRIPLA and for 12 weeks after stopping ATRIPLA.** Serious birth defects have been seen in children of women treated during pregnancy with one of the medicines in ATRIPLA. Women must use a reliable form of barrier contraception, such as a condom or diaphragm, even if they also use other methods of birth control, while on ATRIPLA and for 12 weeks after stopping ATRIPLA.
- **Are breastfeeding: Women with HIV should not breastfeed** because they can pass HIV through their milk to the baby. Also, ATRIPLA may pass through breast milk and cause serious harm to the baby.
- **Have liver problems, including hepatitis B or C virus infection.**
- **Have ever had seizures:** Seizures have occurred in patients taking a component of ATRIPLA, usually in those with a history of seizures. If you have ever had seizures, or take medicine for seizures, your healthcare provider may want to switch you to another medicine or monitor you.
- **Have ever had mental illness or use drugs or alcohol.**

**Contact your healthcare provider right away if you experience any of the following serious or common side effects:**

**Serious side effects associated with ATRIPLA:**

- **Severe depression, strange thoughts, or angry behavior** have been reported by a small number of patients. Some patients have had thoughts of suicide, and a few have actually committed suicide. These problems may occur more often in patients who have had mental illness.
- **Kidney problems** (including decline or failure of kidney function). If you have had kidney problems, or take other medicines that may cause kidney problems, your healthcare provider should do regular blood tests. Symptoms that may be related to kidney problems include a high volume of urine, thirst, muscle pain, and muscle weakness.
- **Other serious liver problems.** Some patients have experienced serious liver problems, including liver failure resulting in transplantation or death. Most of these serious side effects occurred in patients with a chronic liver disease such as hepatitis infection, but there have also been a few reports in patients without any existing liver disease.
- **Bone changes.** Lab tests show changes in the bones of patients treated with tenofovir DF, a component of ATRIPLA. Some HIV patients treated with tenofovir DF developed thinning of the bones (osteopenia), which could lead to fractures. Also, bone pain and softening of the bone (which may lead to fractures) may occur as a consequence of kidney problems. If you have had bone problems in the past, your healthcare provider may want to check your bones.

**Common side effects:**

- **Dizziness, headache, trouble sleeping, drowsiness, trouble concentrating, and/or unusual dreams.** These side effects tend to go away after taking ATRIPLA for a few weeks. These symptoms may be more severe with the use of alcohol and/or mood-altering (street) drugs. If you are dizzy, have trouble concentrating, and/or are drowsy, avoid activities that may be dangerous, such as driving or operating machinery.
- **Rash** is a common side effect that usually goes away without any change in treatment, but may be serious in a small number of patients.
- **Other common side effects include:** tiredness, upset stomach, vomiting, gas, and diarrhea.

**Other possible side effects:**

- Changes in body fat have been seen in some people taking anti-HIV-1 medicines. The cause and long-term health effects are not known.
- Skin discoloration (small spots or freckles) may also happen.
- If you notice any symptoms of infection, contact your healthcare provider right away.
- Additional side effects are inflammation of the pancreas, allergic reaction (including swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat), shortness of breath, pain, stomach pain, weakness, and indigestion.

You should take ATRIPLA once daily on an empty stomach. Taking ATRIPLA at bedtime may make some side effects less bothersome.

ATRIPLA is one of several treatment options your doctor may consider.

**You are encouraged to report negative side effects of prescription drugs to the FDA.**
**Visit www.fda.gov/medwatch or call 1-800-FDA-1088.**

**Please see Patient Information on the following pages.**

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If you or someone you know needs help paying for medicine, call 1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669). Or go to www.pparx.org
Partnership for Prescription Assistance

**FDA-Approved Patient Labeling**

**Patient Information**

**ATRIPLA® (uh TRIP luh) Tablets**

**ALERT: Find out about medicines that should NOT be taken with ATRIPLA.**

Please also read the section **"MEDICINES YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE WITH ATRIPLA."**

Generic name: efavirenz, emtricitabine and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (eh FAH vih renz, em tri SIT uh bean and te NOE' fo veer dye soe PROX il FYOU mar ate)

Read the Patient Information that comes with ATRIPLA® (efavirenz/emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate) before you start taking it and each time you get a refill since there may be new information. This information does not take the place of talking to your healthcare provider about your medical condition or treatment. You should stay under a healthcare provider's care when taking ATRIPLA. **Do not change or stop your medicine without first talking with your healthcare provider.** Talk to your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you have any questions about ATRIPLA.

**What is the most important information I should know about ATRIPLA?**

- **Some people who have taken medicine like ATRIPLA (which contains nucleoside analogs) have developed a serious condition called lactic acidosis** (buildup of an acid in the blood). Lactic acidosis can be a medical emergency and may need to be treated in the hospital. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get the following signs or symptoms of lactic acidosis:**
  - You feel very weak or tired.
  - You have unusual (not normal) muscle pain.
  - You have trouble breathing.
  - You have stomach pain with nausea and vomiting.
  - You feel cold, especially in your arms and legs.
  - You feel dizzy or lightheaded.
  - You have a fast or irregular heartbeat.
- **Some people who have taken medicines like ATRIPLA have developed serious liver problems called hepatotoxicity,** with liver enlargement (hepatomegaly) and fat in the liver (steatosis). **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get the following signs or symptoms of liver problems:**
  - Your skin or the white part of your eyes turns yellow (jaundice).
  - Your urine turns dark.
  - Your bowel movements (stools) turn light in color.
  - You don't feel like eating food for several days or longer.
  - You feel sick to your stomach (nausea).
  - You have lower stomach area (abdominal) pain.
- **You may be more likely to get lactic acidosis or liver problems** if you are female, very overweight (obese), or have been taking nucleoside analog-containing medicines, like ATRIPLA, for a long time.
- **If you also have hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection and you stop taking ATRIPLA, you may get a "flare-up" of your hepatitis. A "flare-up" is when the disease suddenly returns in a worse way than before.** Patients with HBV who stop taking ATRIPLA need close medical follow-up for several months, including medical exams and blood tests to check for hepatitis that could be getting worse. ATRIPLA is not approved for the treatment of HBV, so you must discuss your HBV therapy with your healthcare provider.

**What is ATRIPLA?**

ATRIPLA contains 3 medicines, SUSTIVA® (efavirenz), EMTRIVA® (emtricitabine) and VIREAD® (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate also called tenofovir DF) combined in one pill. EMTRIVA and VIREAD are HIV-1 (human immunodeficiency virus) nucleoside analog reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs) and SUSTIVA is an HIV-1 non-nucleoside analog reverse transcriptase inhibitor (NNRTI). VIREAD and EMTRIVA are the components of TRUVADA®. ATRIPLA can be used alone as a complete regimen, or in combination with other anti-HIV-1 medicines to treat people with HIV-1 infection. ATRIPLA is for adults age 18 and over. ATRIPLA has not been studied in children under age 18 or adults over age 65.

HIV infection destroys $CD4^+$ T cells, which are important to the immune system. The immune system helps fight infection. After a large number of T cells are destroyed, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) develops.

ATRIPLA helps block HIV-1 reverse transcriptase, a viral chemical in your body (enzyme) that is needed for HIV-1 to multiply. ATRIPLA lowers the amount of HIV-1 in the blood (viral load). ATRIPLA may also help to increase the number of T cells ($CD4^+$ cells), allowing your immune system to improve. Lowering the amount of HIV-1 in the blood lowers the chance of death or infections that happen when your immune system is weak (opportunistic infections).

**Does ATRIPLA cure HIV-1 or AIDS?**

**ATRIPLA does not cure HIV-1 infection or AIDS.** The long-term effects of ATRIPLA are not known at this time. People taking ATRIPLA may still get opportunistic infections or other conditions that happen with HIV-1 infection. Opportunistic infections are infections that develop because the immune system is weak. Some of these conditions are pneumonia, herpes virus infections, and *Mycobacterium avium complex* (MAC) infection. **It is very important that you see your healthcare provider regularly while taking ATRIPLA.**

**Does ATRIPLA reduce the risk of passing HIV-1 to others?**

**ATRIPLA has not been shown to lower your chance of passing HIV-1 to other people through sexual contact, sharing needles, or being exposed to your blood.**

- **Do not share needles or other injection equipment.**
- **Do not share personal items that can have blood or body fluids on them, like toothbrushes or razor blades.**



- **Do not have any kind of sex without protection.** Always practice safer sex by using a latex or polyurethane condom or other barrier to reduce the chance of sexual contact with semen, vaginal secretions, or blood.

**Who should not take ATRIPLA?**

Together with your healthcare provider, you need to decide whether ATRIPLA is right for you.

Do not take ATRIPLA if you are allergic to ATRIPLA or any of its ingredients. The active ingredients of ATRIPLA are efavirenz, emtricitabine, and tenofovir DF. See the end of this leaflet for a complete list of ingredients.

**What should I tell my healthcare provider before taking ATRIPLA? Tell your healthcare provider if you:**

- **Are pregnant or planning to become pregnant** (see "What should I avoid while taking ATRIPLA?").
- **Are breast-feeding** (see "What should I avoid while taking ATRIPLA?").
- **Have kidney problems or are undergoing kidney dialysis treatment.**
- **Have bone problems.**
- **Have liver problems, including hepatitis B virus infection.** Your healthcare provider may want to do tests to check your liver while you take ATRIPLA.
- **Have ever had mental illness or are using drugs or alcohol.**
- **Have ever had seizures or are taking medicine for seizures.**

**What important information should I know about taking other medicines with ATRIPLA?**

**ATRIPLA may change the effect of other medicines, including the ones for HIV-1, and may cause serious side effects.** Your healthcare provider may change your other medicines or change their doses. Other medicines, including herbal products, may affect ATRIPLA. For this reason, **it is very important to** let all your healthcare providers and pharmacists know what medications, herbal supplements, or vitamins you are taking.

**MEDICINES YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE WITH ATRIPLA**

- The following medicines may cause serious and life-threatening side effects when taken with ATRIPLA. You should not take any of these medicines while taking ATRIPLA: Vascor (bepridil), Propulsid (cisapride), Versed (midazolam), Orap (pimozide), Halcion (triazolam), ergot medications (for example, Wigraine and Cafergot).
- ATRIPLA also should not be used with Combivir (lamivudine/zidovudine), EMTRIVA, Epivir, Epivir-HBV (lamivudine), Epzicom (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine), Trizivir (abacavir sulfate/lamivudine/zidovudine), SUSTIVA, TRUVADA, or VIREAD.
- Vfend (voriconazole) should not be taken with ATRIPLA since it may lose its effect or may increase the chance of having side effects from ATRIPLA.
- **Do not take St. John's wort *(Hypericum perforatum),* or products containing St. John's wort with ATRIPLA.** St. John's wort is an herbal product sold as a dietary supplement. Talk with your healthcare provider if you are taking or are planning to take St. John's wort. Taking St. John's wort may decrease ATRIPLA levels and lead to increased viral load and possible resistance to ATRIPLA or cross-resistance to other anti-HIV-1 drugs.
- ATRIPLA should not be used with HEPSERA® (adefovir dipivoxil).

It is also important to tell your healthcare provider if you are taking any of the following:

- Fortovase, Invirase (saquinavir), Biaxin (clarithromycin), Noxafil (posaconazole), or Sporanox (itraconazole); **these medicines may need to be replaced with another medicine when taken with ATRIPLA.**
- Calcium channel blockers such as Cardizem or Tiazac (diltiazem), Covera HS or Isoptin (verapamil) and others; Crixivan (indinavir), Selzentry (maraviroc); the immunosuppressant medicines cyclosporine (Gengraf, Neoral, Sandimmune, and others), Prograf (tacrolimus), or Rapamune (sirolimus); Methadone; Mycobutin (rifabutin); Rifampin; cholesterol-lowering medicines such as Lipitor (atorvastatin), Pravachol (pravastatin sodium), and Zocor (simvastatin); or Zoloft (sertraline); **these medicines may need to have their dose changed when taken with ATRIPLA.**
- Videx, Videx EC (didanosine); tenofovir DF (a component of ATRIPLA) may increase the amount of didanosine in your blood, which could result in more side effects. **You may need to be monitored more carefully** if you are taking ATRIPLA and didanosine together. Also, the dose of didanosine may need to be changed.
- Reyataz (atazanavir sulfate) or Kaletra (lopinavir/ritonavir); these medicines may increase the amount of tenofovir DF (a component of ATRIPLA) in your blood, which could result in more side effects. Reyataz is not recommended with ATRIPLA. **You may need to be monitored more carefully** if you are taking ATRIPLA and Kaletra together. Also, the dose of Kaletra may need to be changed.
- Medicine for seizures [for example, Dilantin (phenytoin), Tegretol (carbamazepine), or phenobarbital]; your healthcare provider may want to switch you to another medicine or check drug levels in your blood from time to time.

**These are not all the medicines that may cause problems if you take ATRIPLA. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about all medicines that you take.**

Keep a complete list of all the prescription and nonprescription medicines as well as any herbal remedies that you are taking, how much you take, and how often you take them. Make a new list when medicines or herbal remedies are added or stopped, or if the dose changes. Give copies of this list to all of your healthcare providers and pharmacists **every** time you visit your healthcare provider or fill a prescription. This will give your healthcare provider a complete picture of the medicines you use. Then he or she can decide the best approach for your situation.

**How should I take ATRIPLA?**

- Take the exact amount of ATRIPLA your healthcare provider prescribes. Never change the dose on your own. Do not stop this medicine unless your healthcare provider tells you to stop.
- You should take ATRIPLA on an empty stomach.
- Swallow ATRIPLA with water.
- Taking ATRIPLA at bedtime may make some side effects less bothersome.
- Do not miss a dose of ATRIPLA. If you forget to take ATRIPLA, take the missed dose right away, unless it is almost time for your next dose. Do not double the next dose. Carry on with your regular dosing schedule. If you need help in planning the best times to take your medicine, ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist.
- If you believe you took more than the prescribed amount of ATRIPLA, contact your local poison control center or emergency room right away.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you start any new medicine or change how you take old ones. Your doses may need adjustment.
- When your ATRIPLA supply starts to run low, get more from your healthcare provider or pharmacy. This is very important because the amount of virus in your blood may increase if the medicine is stopped for even a short time. The virus may develop resistance to ATRIPLA and become harder to treat.
- Your healthcare provider may want to do blood tests to check for certain side effects while you take ATRIPLA.

**What should I avoid while taking ATRIPLA?**

- **Women should not become pregnant while taking ATRIPLA and for 12 weeks after stopping it.** Serious birth defects have been seen in the babies of animals and women treated with efavirenz (a component of ATRIPLA) during pregnancy. It is not known whether efavirenz caused these defects. **Tell your healthcare provider right away if you are pregnant.** Also talk with your healthcare provider if you want to become pregnant.
- Women should not rely only on hormone-based birth control, such as pills, injections, or implants, because ATRIPLA may make these contraceptives ineffective. Women must use a reliable form of barrier contraception, such as a condom or diaphragm, even if they also use other methods of birth control. Efavirenz, a component of ATRIPLA, may remain in your blood for a time after therapy is stopped. Therefore, you should continue to use contraceptive measures for 12 weeks after you stop taking ATRIPLA.
- **Do not breast-feed if you are taking ATRIPLA.** The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that mothers with HIV not breast-feed because they can pass the HIV through their milk to the baby. Also, ATRIPLA may pass through breast milk and cause serious harm to the baby. Talk with your healthcare provider if you are breast-feeding. You should stop breast-feeding or may need to use a different medicine.
- Taking ATRIPLA with alcohol or other medicines causing similar side effects as ATRIPLA, such as drowsiness, may increase those side effects.
- Do not take any other medicines, including prescription and nonprescription medicines and herbal products, without checking with your healthcare provider.
- **Avoid doing things that can spread HIV-1 infection** since ATRIPLA does not stop you from passing the HIV-1 infection to others.

**What are the possible side effects of ATRIPLA?**

**ATRIPLA may cause the following serious side effects:**

- **Lactic acidosis** (buildup of an acid in the blood). Lactic acidosis can be a medical emergency and may need to be treated in the hospital. **Call your healthcare provider right away if you get signs of lactic acidosis.** (See "What is the most important information I should know about ATRIPLA?")
- **Serious liver problems (hepatotoxicity),** with liver enlargement (hepatomegaly) and fat in the liver (steatosis). Call your healthcare provider right away if you get any signs of liver problems. (See "What is the most important information I should know about ATRIPLA?")
- **"Flare-ups" of hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection,** in which the disease suddenly returns in a worse way than before, can occur if you have HBV and you stop taking ATRIPLA. Your healthcare provider will monitor your condition for several months after stopping ATRIPLA if you have both HIV-1 and HBV infection and may recommend treatment for your HBV. ATRIPLA is not approved for the treatment of hepatitis B virus infection. If you have advanced liver disease and stop treatment with ATRIPLA, the "flare-up" of hepatitis B may cause your liver function to decline.
- **Serious psychiatric problems.** A small number of patients may experience severe depression, strange thoughts, or angry behavior while taking ATRIPLA. Some patients have thoughts of suicide and a few have actually committed suicide. These problems may occur more often in patients who have had mental illness. Contact your healthcare provider right away if you think you are having these psychiatric symptoms, so your healthcare provider can decide if you should continue to take ATRIPLA.
- **Kidney problems** (including decline or failure of kidney function). If you have had kidney problems in the past or take other medicines that can cause kidney problems, your healthcare provider should do regular blood tests to check your kidneys. Symptoms that may be related to kidney problems include a high volume of urine, thirst, muscle pain, and muscle weakness.
- **Other serious liver problems.** Some patients have experienced serious liver problems including liver failure resulting in transplantation or death. Most of these serious side effects occurred in patients with a chronic liver disease such as hepatitis infection, but there have also been a few reports in patients without any existing liver disease.

ATRIPLA® (efavirenz/emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate)

- **Changes in bone mineral density (thinning bones).** Laboratory tests show changes in the bones of patients treated with tenofovir DF, a component of ATRIPLA. Some HIV patients treated with tenofovir DF developed thinning of the bones (osteopenia) which could lead to fractures. If you have had bone problems in the past, your healthcare provider may need to do tests to check your bone mineral density or may prescribe medicines to help your bone mineral density. Additionally, bone pain and softening of the bone (which may contribute to fractures) may occur as a consequence of kidney problems.

**Common side effects:**

Patients may have dizziness, headache, trouble sleeping, drowsiness, trouble concentrating, and/or unusual dreams during treatment with ATRIPLA. These side effects may be reduced if you take ATRIPLA at bedtime on an empty stomach. They also tend to go away after you have taken the medicine for a few weeks. If you have these common side effects, such as dizziness, it does not mean that you will also have serious psychiatric problems, such as severe depression, strange thoughts, or angry behavior. Tell your healthcare provider right away if any of these side effects continue or if they bother you. It is possible that these symptoms may be more severe if ATRIPLA is used with alcohol or mood altering (street) drugs.

If you are dizzy, have trouble concentrating, or are drowsy, avoid activities that may be dangerous, such as driving or operating machinery.

Rash may be common. Rashes usually go away without any change in treatment. In a small number of patients, rash may be serious. If you develop a rash, call your healthcare provider right away.

Other common side effects include tiredness, upset stomach, vomiting, gas, and diarrhea.

**Other possible side effects with ATRIPLA:**

- Changes in body fat. Changes in body fat develop in some patients taking anti-HIV-1 medicine. These changes may include an increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck ("buffalo hump"), in the breasts, and around the trunk. Loss of fat from the legs, arms, and face may also happen. The cause and long-term health effects of these fat changes are not known.
- Skin discoloration (small spots or freckles) may also happen with ATRIPLA.
- In some patients with advanced HIV infection (AIDS), signs and symptoms of inflammation from previous infections may occur soon after anti-HIV treatment is started. It is believed that these symptoms are due to an improvement in the body's immune response, enabling the body to fight infections that may have been present with no obvious symptoms. If you notice any symptoms of infection, please inform your doctor immediately.
- Additional side effects are inflammation of the pancreas, allergic reaction (including swelling of the face, lips, tongue, or throat), shortness of breath, pain, stomach pain, weakness and indigestion.

Tell your healthcare provider or pharmacist if you notice any side effects while taking ATRIPLA.

Contact your healthcare provider before stopping ATRIPLA because of side effects or for any other reason.

This is not a complete list of side effects possible with ATRIPLA. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for a more complete list of side effects of ATRIPLA and all the medicines you will take.

**How do I store ATRIPLA?**

- **Keep ATRIPLA and all other medicines out of reach of children.**
- Store ATRIPLA at room temperature 77 °F (25 °C).
- Keep ATRIPLA in its original container and keep the container tightly closed.
- Do not keep medicine that is out of date or that you no longer need. If you throw any medicines away make sure that children will not find them.

**General information about ATRIPLA:**

Medicines are sometimes prescribed for conditions that are not mentioned in patient information leaflets. Do not use ATRIPLA for a condition for which it was not prescribed. Do not give ATRIPLA to other people, even if they have the same symptoms you have. It may harm them.

This leaflet summarizes the most important information about ATRIPLA. If you would like more information, talk with your healthcare provider. You can ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist for information about ATRIPLA that is written for health professionals.

Do not use ATRIPLA if the seal over bottle opening is broken or missing.

**What are the ingredients of ATRIPLA?**

**Active Ingredients:** efavirenz, emtricitabine, and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate

**Inactive Ingredients:** croscarmellose sodium, hydroxypropyl cellulose, microcrystalline cellulose, magnesium stearate, sodium lauryl sulfate. The film coating contains black iron oxide, polyethylene glycol, polyvinyl alcohol, red iron oxide, talc, and titanium dioxide.

**℞ ONLY**

May 2010

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[continued from page 10]

I had always liked to write, even in school, but never thought about doing it on a professional level. My teachers used to have me read parts of my papers in class, so I think I've always had some ability. I started *Passion Marks* because I was really interested in the subject of domestic violence in gay relationships, which is something that is rarely talked about publicly. My last year or so in undergraduate school, I started the story and let it evolve over the next year or so. After I finished the first draft of the novel, I was hooked on writing!

***SWERV: What kinds of stories were you writing in school? Was it fiction? Was* Passion Marks *your first story with same-gender-loving characters?***
**LH:** I wasn't writing anything special in high school; just whatever was required in English class [laughter]. Yes, *Passion Marks* was my first story dealing with SGL characters. The cool part about it is that book was released in 2003, but people have really bonded to the main characters and have been pressing me, even now, to write more about Kevin and Darryl. People want to know what happened to their love and their relationship. I'm not sure I'll write that story, but who knows what the future holds? I will say that you will see Kevin and Darryl in *The Bad Seed*, even though this isn't the love story about them that people want to read.

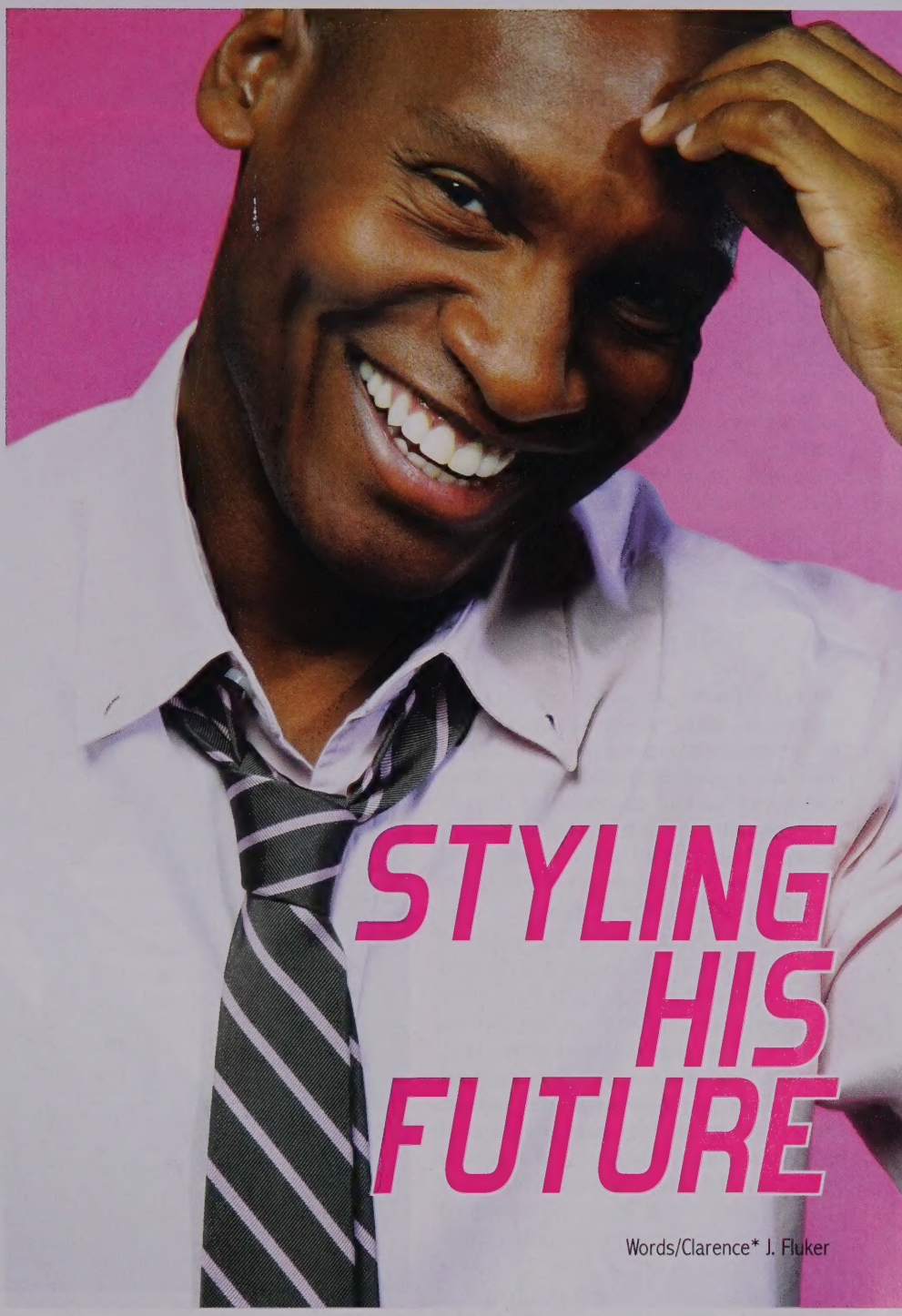
***SWERV: Yes! It's an honor to have people that invested in your work. Not long ago someone asked when I was going to write the* Living the Life *prequel for my character Andre. So now that you're a notable author with five novels to your credit, how has your life changed?***
**LH:** I agree that it is an honor to have people invested. I receive e-mails and Facebook messages quite often from people asking when my next novel will be released; folks are really waiting.

Generally speaking, I'm pretty grounded and by design I keep my life pretty simple. Because I'm published I've had opportunities to network and meet more people, from industry executives to book club members. And a lot more people know my name!

***SWERV: I saw in an interview that you were working on a film project. Is there anything you can share about that?***
**LH:** I have finished the screenplay of *Passion Marks* and now I'm working my plan. I don't have anything definite to share but I will say that *Passion Marks* the movie shall come to pass! I'm speaking it into existence. The movie business is a tough business and *Passion Marks* has got to be done right, so I'm willing to wait for the right opportunity.

***SWERV: Are you still loving writing? How have you grown and where do you see yourself going in the future?***
**LH:** Well, I have been talking about retiring from writing for years now, but I keep on going. In fact, I'm about 300 pages into a book I hope will come out right after *The Bad Seed*. I think readers have seen the growth in my writing style and story execution over the course of my novels. I definitely feel more seasoned and confident as a writer. In the future I want to supplement novels with script writing and even move into a producer role for works that I want to see created.

*Visit Lee Hayes' web site at www.leehayes.info.*



# STYLING HIS FUTURE

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker

In the play *The Colored Museum* by George C. Wolfe, Miss Roj declares that "God created black people and black people created style." Few can argue with the gospel of Miss Roj— and the career of Marcellas Reynolds is a living testimony to it.

Born and raised on the South Side of Chicago, Marcellas Reynolds grew up with classic good looks and a penchant for being able to accentuate his lean body, sculpted cheekbones and chocolate dark skin while expressing himself through fashion. In the mid '90s while Reynolds was working as a waiter in Chicago two patrons took particular note. They worked for a modeling agency and could see that Reynolds could serve meals, drinks and face. For the next seven years Reynolds would split his time between New York and Chicago working as a professional model. With representation by some of the top modeling and talent agencies in the country, he was afforded the opportunity to work for such well-known design companies as Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Brioni and Nautica.

Styles are ever changing and constantly evolving into something new. As a model, Reynolds adopted the same outlook for his career. Knowing that the employment of a male model is not often long-lived, he began focusing his energy on acting classes and leveraging his understanding of fashion, bodies and trends into work as a stylist. Shortly after, his list of advertising clientele as a fashion stylist was just as impressive as the list of companies for whom he was posing in front of the camera.

By 2002, Reynolds had decided that he was ready to move on from modeling. That is when his preparation met opportunity in a big way; he got a call from the producers of the CBS summertime hit series *Big Brother* asking if he'd be interested in participating in the third season. "During a meeting with the producers of *Big Brother* they said they didn't want to refer to me as 'model' and asked if I did anything else. I said, 'Well, I just started styling,' and there you have it," says Reynolds. "That is when the transition really started."

Season 3 of *Big Brother* was watched by 14 million people and each time Reynolds appeared on the screen, so did his name and the word "stylist." He made it almost to the end of the reality competition but was evicted in the final few episodes. However, the moment he left the *Big Brother* house, E! Network and several agents and producers looked for him and his rather wicked tongue; he started getting booked for appearances on other shows almost immediately. *Big Brother* opened up doors for him as an on-air host, style czar and pop culture pundit.

"Being on a reality show gets you a boost," say Reynolds, "but you definitely have to have the goods to back it up." Because of his preparation during his years as a model—taking classes and doing advertorial and personal styling—he was able to leverage the new fame to help build his personal brand and his career as a stylist. He admits that in the beginning it was difficult. "People wanted to see dramatic, over-the-top Marcellas and he's just a guy I played on TV for a summer," he explains. But Reynolds is much more than that and, with his talent, charm and signature style, he's been proving it ever since.

The year following his stint on *Big Brother* (2003) the Style Network booked him for *How Do I Look* for the first time. Now he holds the record for the most appearances on the show; he just shot his 13th. Right now on television he can also be seen on *Style Star* and is a frequent guest on *Geraldo at Large*. This spring Reynolds appeared as a correspondent on *E! News Live from the Oscars* covering the red carpet. His television resume also includes past appearances on the

[continued on page 27]

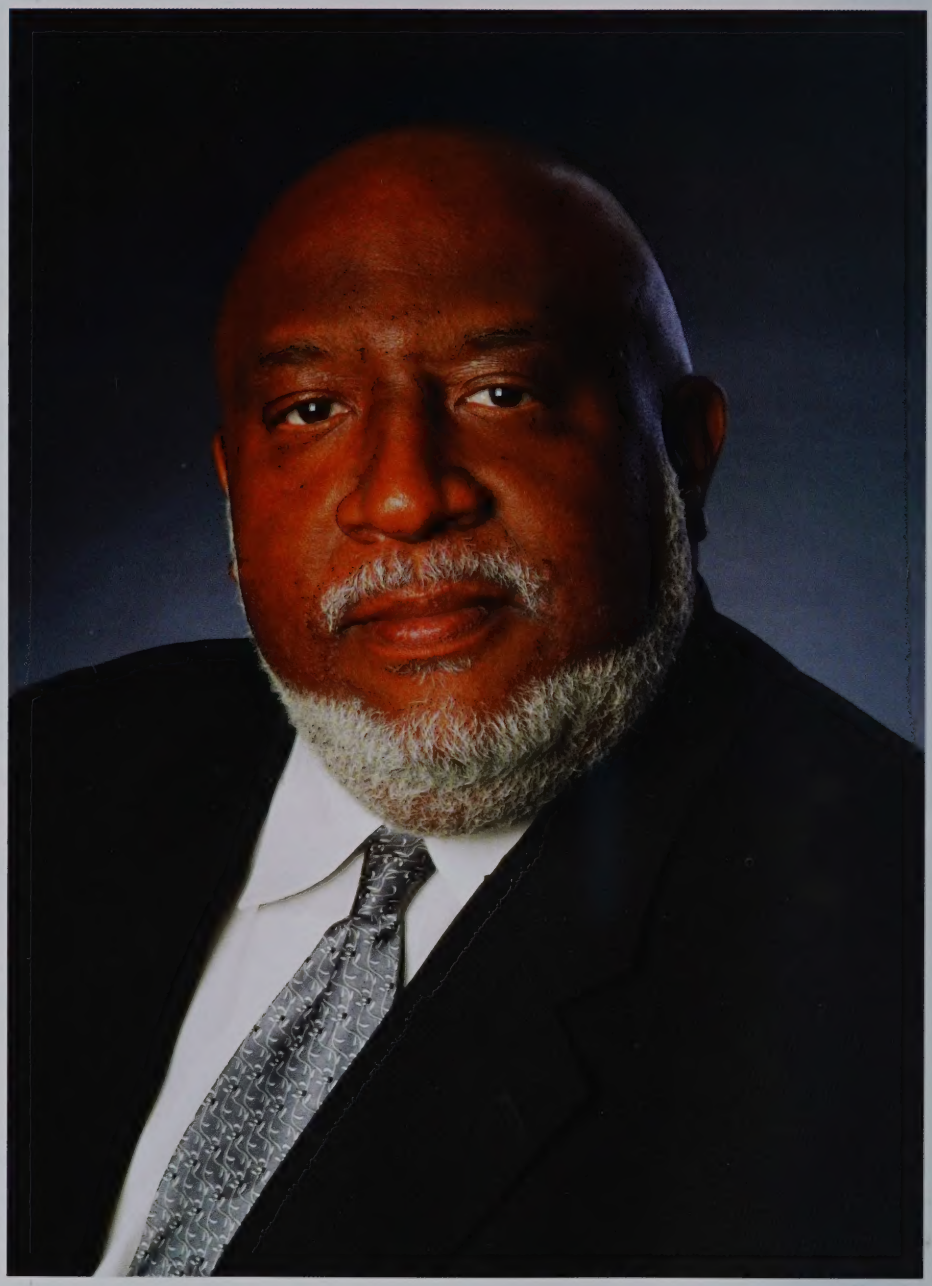
# Darryl Moore: Serving the Public Good

Words/Jamil Fletcher

*Darryl Moore is a man who believes in helping his community. The city councilmember from Berkeley, Calif. (District 2) cut his teeth in the political scenes of both Chicago and Washington, D.C. Whether through his role as an elected official or his participation on both local and national boards, Moore exemplifies what it is to work for the public good. Currently, Moore serves as the board chairman of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), a national organization that advocates on behalf of black LGBT people everywhere. SWERV caught up with Moore to get his thoughts on politics, homophobia, President Obama and more.*

***SWERV: What prompted you to seek public office?***

**Darryl Moore:** In high school and college I was involved in student government, so from an early age, I have been interested in helping others and being part of the political debate. I graduated with a master's degree in public policy from the University of Chicago in 1986. During my tenure in Chicago I worked for an alderman who represented Hyde Park; he exposed me to the local politics, and I worked with his constituents to help solve their neighborhood problems. After leaving Chicago, I moved to Washington, D.C. as an Urban Fellow [of the National Urban Fellows program] where I further developed my love for local government and the real impact it has on the lives of its citizens. In 1996, I moved to Berkeley, Calif. where I was hired as a council aide for a Berkeley councilmember. With his encouragement, in 1998 I ran for the Berkeley School Board but lost that election. In 2000, I was elected to the Peralta Community College Board of Trustees where I served for four years. In 2004, I was elected to the Berkeley City Council representing District 2, which covers South and West Berkeley, and in 2004 I was re-elected to my second four-year term. I ran for the city council because I believed I would be an asset to the council with my background in municipal budgeting, and could aggressively fight for city resources in South-West Berkeley that had been neglected and overlooked.



***SWERV: Tell me about your role as board chair of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC).***

**DM:** I joined the National Black Justice Coalition board in 2005; I was elected treasurer and served in that capacity for six years. In April 2010, I was elected chair of the NBJC board. While NBJC is a relatively young organization [established in 2003], we have accomplished a lot in eight years. As chair, I lead monthly board meetings, work closely with our executive director/CEO Sharon Lettman-Hicks, represent NBJC in public forums, and help raise funds and sponsorships for the organization.

Last year, I presided over the NBJC's first "OUT on the Hill" in conjunction with the Congressional Black Caucus. "OUT on the Hill" convenes black LGBT activists, thought leaders, elected officials, faith leaders and youth from all over the country to participate in social action on the national stage, to demonstrate that all politics are local. We educate our congressional leaders, the Obama administration and federal

agencies on public policy concerns of black LGBT people and our families.

***SWERV: Where does NBJC fit in the overall LGBT movement for equal rights?***
**DM:** NBJC has provided leadership at the intersection of mainstream civil rights groups and mainstream LGBT organizations since 2003, advocating for the unique challenges and needs of the African-American LGBT community, a community that is often relegated to the sidelines. NBJC envisions a world where all people are fully empowered to participate safely, openly and honestly in family, faith and community, regardless of race, gender identity or sexual orientation.

The need for NBJC is stronger than ever. Without authentic, meaningful representation and active participation from the African-American LGBT community, LGBT equality cannot be positioned effectively within the broader civil rights context that it deserves. This requires much more than episodic collaborations; it entails building and sustaining relationships, including addressing the challenges between African-American communities and LGBT advocates—challenges that have created barriers to developing full partnerships. Within the African-American community itself, the need to eradicate homophobia is critical to fostering acceptance and respect for our brothers, sisters and families.

Homophobia, and the anti-gay oppression it engenders, has severely limited the extent to which African-American LGBT people live open lives. To counter this, NBJC is deepening its focus on the African-American family, putting a face on the black LGBT community, and fostering a collective effort to accord dignity and respect to all African-American families as an important step in individual and community empowerment. "Building Stronger Black Families" is the theme guiding NBJC's planning and program development as we focus on removing the inequalities of policy-based initiatives that weaken families, communities and, ultimately, the country.

***SWERV: What are the most pressing issues facing black members of the LGBT community?***
**DM:** I believe the most pressing issue facing black members of the LGBT community has been and continues to be the struggle for black LGBT voices to be effectively heard and listened to and taken seriously in the broader LGBT civil rights movement. While marriage equality is very important, so is ending employment and housing discrimination, closing the gap in regard to health care disparities, and reducing high unemployment in the black LGBT community.

***SWERV: How do you feel about President Obama's performance?***
**DM:** I think President Obama has done a good job as president thus far. He inherited a huge financial mess from the past administration during one of the most difficult economic climates our country has ever seen. Ending "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" [DADT] was a tremendous victory for the President, as was passing the health bill and the administration's decision not to defend DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act]. Much to his credit the economy is slowly beginning to turn around and unemployment numbers are beginning to decrease. Also, I understand that President Obama has appointed more openly LGBT people to federal positions than any other president in history.

The NBJC board and executive director have been to the White House on several occasions; we have fostered a great relationship with the Obama administration and we look forward to working with him in his second term of office.

***SWERV: What can our readers do to get involved with the NBJC?***
**DM:** I encourage all of your readers to go to our web site at www.nbjc.org. At the web site they can learn more about the organization and how they may join NBJC and/or sign up for our monthly newsletter. To help NBJC achieve its mission, I encourage readers to go to our web site and make a financial contribution or become monthly contributors by joining our "Justice Society." NBJC will be hosting our second annual "OUT on the Hill" conference in Washington, D.C. Sept. 20-25, 2011; it's a great opportunity for black LGBT people to learn about national policy initiatives and let their voices be heard by our congressional leaders.

## STYLING HIS FUTURE

[continued from page 25]

*Tyra Banks Show, E! News*, MTV's *From G's to Gents*, BET's *Remixed*, *CBS This Morning* and *Fashion Rocks: Iconic Style*. His tentacles in the media world don't just stop at television. He's also ventured into writing for Style Network's mystyle.com, and West Hollywood's online news source, WehoDaily.com.

His styling work continues, and he's had the pleasure of working with celebrities such as Sharon Stone in recent years, as well as the Riker brothers—Drew and Derek Riker, former models turned fashion photographers. Reynolds modeled with the Riker brothers in the '90s; now he styles the shots and they shoot them.

Reynolds describes his personal style as "classic male with a hip dandy twist." He has a preference for traditional men's wear—blazers, trousers and suits—but a fetish for adding personality with funky pocket squares and scarves. Reynolds, a self-proclaimed shoe addict, also counts shoes at the top of his list of favorite things. "I'm most inspired by what the kids are wearing and by movies from every era, especially the '40s and early '70s, and with iconic men like Steve McQueen, Alain Delon and Gordon Parks," he says.

Reynolds offers this style advice: "People judge you by your shoes, purse and watch. Spend money on those three things and you will be alright." He adds, "A Rolex on a man speaks volumes, as does good, well-maintained shoes. A woman should have a good bag. Not covered in logos—that's tacky—but by a good designer or fashion house. Women know good when they see it."

A man with just as much substance as he has style, Reynolds also encourages choosing at least one charity and working closely with them as a volunteer. He's been a long-time supporter of Project Angel Food in Los Angeles. Project Angel Food cooks and delivers free and nutritious meals to men, women and children affected by HIV/AIDS, cancer and other life-threatening illnesses. They deliver nearly 14,000 meals each week to people in need.

What's next for Marcellas Reynolds? Recently he pitched a concept for his own project that's now under consideration by a major cable network. Keep in style and keep up with him on www.marcellasreynolds.com or via Twitter@MarqueeMarc.

# CONVERSATIONS

## With Sundiata Alayé

## Sometimes Love Isn't Enough: A Cautionary Tale

*He was my North, my South,*
*my East and West,*
*My working week and*
*my Sunday rest,*
*My noon, my midnight,*
*my talk, my song;*
*I thought that love would last forever:*
*I was wrong.*
*—W.H. Auden*

Marcus says he doesn't know how he fell so fast and so hard for Lee, but he did. They met online in the summer several years ago. Marcus was a workaholic and single for many years. Because he didn't have much of a social life, his friends suggested that he might want to try online dating. Reluctantly, he agreed, and within a week, met Lee. They began communicating via phone, e-mail and text messages. They were living in different states, but as luck would have it, Lee was already relocating to Marcus' city. Marcus took this as a sign that this brother was *the one*.

According to Marcus, when they met it was love at first sight. "He was amazing. A beautiful surprise; extremely handsome, very well-educated, sexy and in exceptional shape," Marcus says. Shortly after he moved, Lee told Marcus that he was HIV-positive and had been on medications for several years. Marcus assured him that his positive status wasn't a concern to him. "I'm smart enough to know how to protect myself, or at least I thought I was," says Marcus. Not even Lee's closest friends knew of his positive status and Marcus supported him in keeping his secret. It's a decision that he says he now regrets. "I believe not disclosing his status meant that he was ashamed. Shame breeds lies, deceit, contempt and, most of all, denial," he says. "It keeps you from loving and accepting yourself in your complete reality. I should have done more to encourage him to come clean with his friends. It may have saved us both."

Just three months after they started dating, Marcus received an anonymous e-mail forwarded from Adam4Adam. It was his boyfriend's torso. "I immediately recognized him," he says. "His tattoos were a dead giveaway. I confronted him about it and he said that it was an old profile he rarely used—although the screen shot sent indicated an "online" status—and since we were exclusive he didn't need it anymore. He said he would delete it." Marcus admits it was a huge warning sign that he should have paid closer attention to. "I wanted to believe it was just a one-time thing. I chose to believe him," he says.

They managed to get through that obstacle and within six months they were living together. In the months to follow, Marcus would find that Lee had many more profiles on hookup sites all over the Internet. According to Marcus, Lee was exchanging numbers and pictures, having "cybersex," and "sexting" dudes he was meeting on Facebook—his *other* addiction. He still had an account on Adam4Adam and inadvertently hit up a close friend of Marcus' a couple of times and even gave him his number.

Marcus told Lee that his behavior was inappropriate for a brother in a relationship. Lee simply dismissed it as innocent "flirting" and "fantasy" and claimed he'd never met any of the dudes he was talking to online. Nonetheless, Lee promised to put an end to it. Marcus wanted so badly to believe him, but it never did stop. "He gave the best of who he was to these total strangers on the Internet: The together, sexy, smart brother with the sexy body who offered wild sexual fantasies beyond one's imagination," he says. "Meanwhile, I was left with everything else: The HIV, hospital visits, surgeries, doctor's appointments, medications—and yes, the bills! I was providing most, if not all, of his financial support.

"Nothing I said mattered. He couldn't see past his own selfishness and obsessions with the Internet, muscled bodies, big penises—and, I would later find out, raw sex—to see how this was affecting him, me or our relationship. He couldn't see how submerging himself in these sexual images, videos, text messages and IMs had desensitized him to the essence of my love. These so-called fantasies, at some point, became his reality."

Last fall, both Marcus and Lee received an anonymous e-mail from someone claiming to know a brother Lee met online and had several sexual encounters with. The e-mail went on to say that the act had been secretly videotaped and the brother was threatening to publish it on XTube. Marcus asked Lee if any of this were true. Lee admitted it was true, but that it occurred during one of their breakups. "I was heartbroken," says Marcus. "He told me that the guy did use protection, but I would later find out, perhaps too late, that he had lied about that, too."

According to Marcus, he and Lee had many breakups. "Anytime I confronted him about his online activities and his lies about them, he'd storm out the door with no contact for days, sometimes weeks," he says. "I started to realize that these arguments were his excuse to leave our house, hit the Internet and meet up with dudes for sex. Even so, I would have never imagined in a million years that he was having unprotected sex."

Last year, Lee told Marcus that it was possible that he had exposed him to syphilis. It turned out he had. "He tried to explain that it was a lingering issue he had prior to our relationship. I knew that wasn't true," he says. Later on that year,

yet another anonymous e-mail would come. This one warned that another brother Lee had sex with not only had syphilis, but was also HIV-positive and notorious for having unprotected sex. "Lee admitted that he had met the brother online and that he did let the brother fuck him raw," Marcus says. "I was completely devastated. I saw my doctor the next morning. A couple of days later he confirmed that I had contracted syphilis, *again*. My doctor, who is a friend and has been in charge of my health care for many years, looked at me in disgust and said, 'What the hell is wrong with you? Not even love can save you from disease!' I can still hear that ringing in my ears. He gave me a painful shot of penicillin and insisted on an HIV test that morning, and at six-week, three-month, and six-month intervals."

A couple of days before he was to receive the results of his last HIV test, Lee told Marcus that he wasn't happy in the relationship, and although he couldn't explain why or how long he had been unhappy he thought they should go their separate ways. Lee started packing the next morning. Marcus says even with all he had been through with Lee, he still wasn't ready to end it all. "We had invested so much into this relationship, and I was so much in love with him, I didn't want to let it go."

Marcus asked him if he was sure about leaving. Lee said he wasn't so Marcus suggested that he take some time to think about it and that they'd discuss it in a couple of days. They never had the chance. The next morning, Marcus received a call from a friend in New York asking when had Lee moved to Florida. "I was confused," says Marcus, "until he told me that he had received a notification that a new member had joined another sexually oriented web site that my friend was a member of. That new member was Lee. I refused to believe him until I saw it for myself, and I did. Lee's pictures were everywhere. The profile said he that he was single and living in Fort Lauderdale. That destroyed me."

"It finally hit me that he really didn't give a damn about me and that our relationship was a lie from the beginning." Marcus admits. "I was thinking about all of the lies he told, the promises broken, and all of the brothers he had allowed to come inside him and then come home to me as if nothing happened. My mind was spinning while in my doctor's office waiting for my last series of test results.

"I wondered how I could so easily turn my precious life over to someone who didn't value himself or me. I thought about the future, the past and all I put into keeping myself healthy and sane. I thought about the pain this would cause my friends and family. I thought about the lies, the porn, his obsession with the Internet, strippers, the text messages from other men in the middle of the night, arguments over his 'recreational' cocaine use, steroids, and the time I wasted loving him, the money I wasted supporting him, and everything else in between.

"My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of my doctor's voice who gave me the news I was dreading but in some ways expecting. 'Marcus,' he said, 'this last test came back positive.' All I could do was to put my head in my hands and cry.

"My doctor knew that my partner and I didn't always have protected sex. I had admitted this to him long before my partner's sexual activities outside of our relationship became apparent. I had no reasonable explanation for it and I still don't. I believed that I was in a committed monogamous relationship. I was in love with him and I thought he was in love with me. I thought we'd always be together. I wanted to please him in every way possible. I knew I was taking certain risks, but I wanted him to feel a sense of normality, if that makes any sense. At least when we were together he could forget about being HIV-positive. I know it sounds naïve—dumb even. It's something that I'm still trying to figure out, especially knowing what I now know."

What Marcus is referring to, and perhaps the most crushing blow of all, is that he didn't contract the HIV virus directly from Lee. "My HIV infection is a result of my partner having been reinfected at least by two, but more likely three, HIV-positive brothers he had raw sex with while we were together. That part is particularly difficult to deal with," Marcus says, as he quietly sobs.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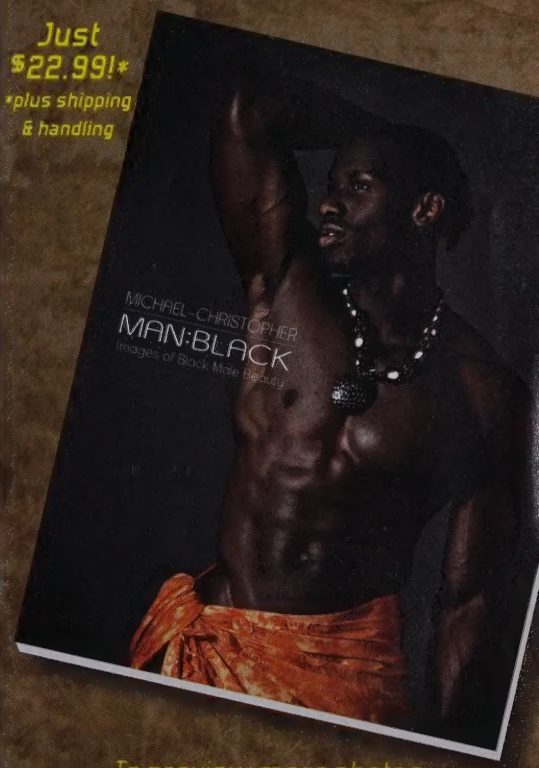


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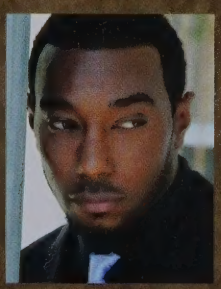

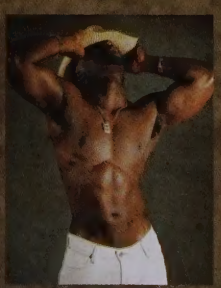

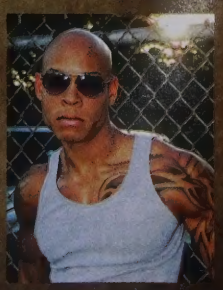

MC BOOKS

**June 23-26, 2011**
**Krash Weekend**
**New York, NY**
**www.krashweekendnyc.com**
A celebration of African-American LGBT heritage and culture in New York City and the Tri-state area.

**June 30 – July 4, 2011**
**Fireworks Atlanta**
**Atlanta, GA**
**www.fireworksatlanta.com**
Rockstars Production and The Lion's Den present a July 4th weekend celebration for both men and women. This five-day event celebrates patriotism and the American spirit of independence. Proceeds go to benefit services for homeless veterans.

**July 3, 2011**
**Remimakuo Media Club: Urban Artistry**
**Chicago, IL**
Join the Remimakuo Media Club for a day of sounds, visuals and words as they assemble vendors in the arts at the Christian Fields Style Bar at 6550 S. Cottage Grove, Chicago IL 60637 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Search for the Remimakuo Media Club page on Facebook.

**July 16, 2011**
**White Attire Affair**
**Washington, DC**
**www.alsura.org**
The theme for this annual party with a cause is Oasis! Pure Love… Pure Joy… Pure Life. Proceeds go to support HIV/AIDS services to people of color.

**July 16, 2011**
**All That Drag: A Benefit to Promote AIDS Awareness**
**Los Angeles, CA**
**Meintoone@yahoo.com**
This showcase of the best male/female drag impersonators and performers benefits the Minority AIDS Project of Los Angeles.

**July 17, 2011**
**Mike Warren Book Release Party**
**Baltimore, MD**
**mikewarren.yolasite.com**
Join the author of *A Private Affair* and *Sweet Swagger* for an afternoon of food, entertainment, music, raffles and other surprises as he celebrates the release of his new title *Sir, Yes Sir*. The event takes place at 5503 Richard Ave., Baltimore, MD 21214 from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Admission is $20.

**August 12-14, 2011**
**Fire Island Black Out (FIBO)**
**Cherry Grove, Fire Island, NY**
**www.fireislandblackout.com**
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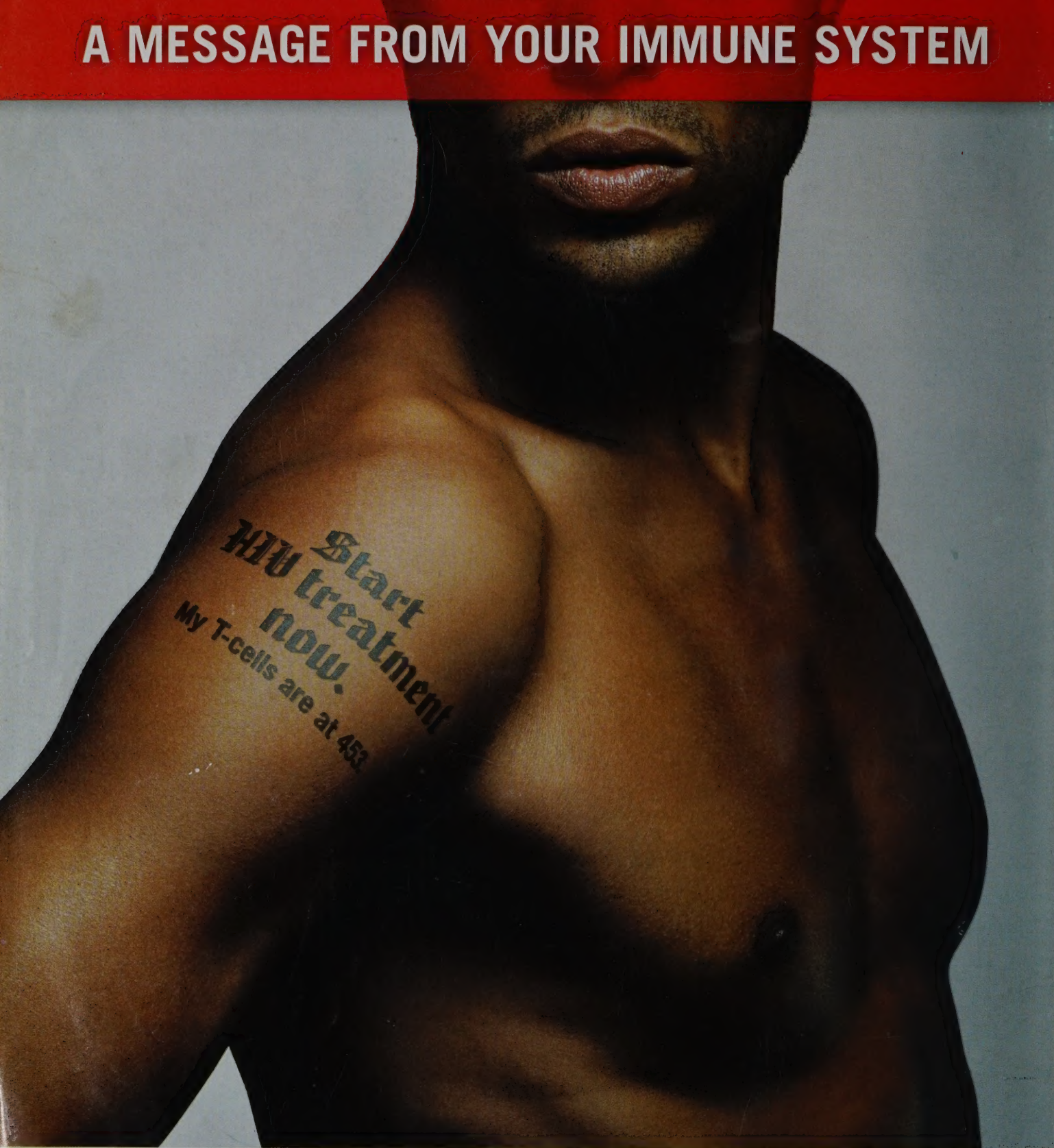


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*DHHS = Department of Health and Human Services †IAS-USA = International AIDS Society USA. ©2011 Gilead Sciences, Inc. All rights reserved. UN7534 03/11

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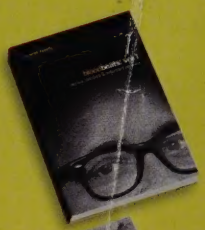

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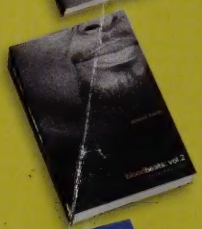

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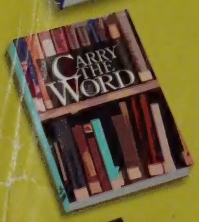


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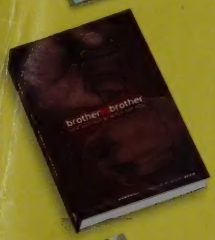


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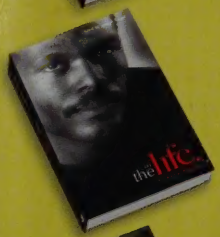


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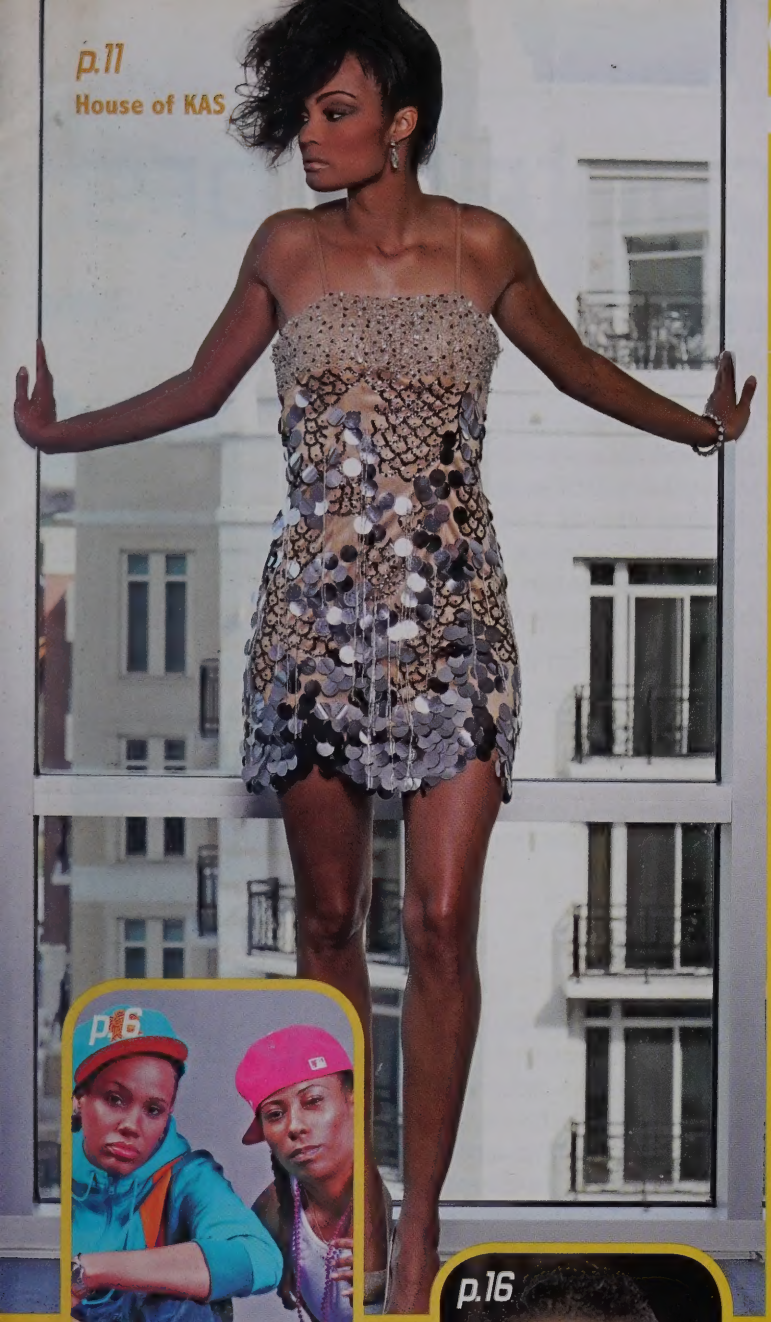

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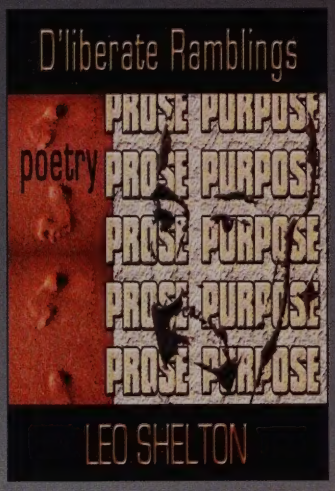


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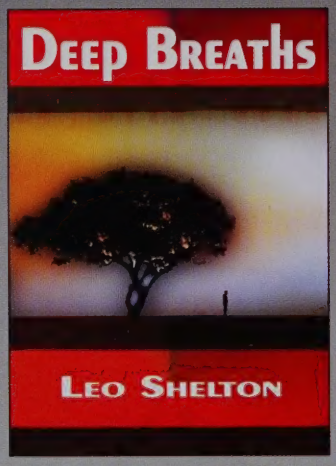


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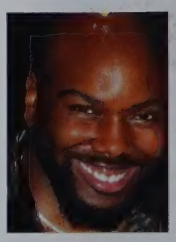
**Alyce Emory** loves soul food, Harlem, film and stories of folk who do good work in our communities.



**L. Michael Gipson** is an Oakland-based cultural critic, community health planner and award-winning youth advocate. His sociopolitical essays have been published in two anthologies, including *Poverty & Race in America: The Emerging Agendas* (Chester Hartman, ed.). As a cultural critic and music journalist, Gipson's work has appeared in *Clik*, *Pulse*, *Arise*, *Pride*, *Amplify*, *Urban Dialect*, *Port of Harlem* and *Creative Loafing ATL*. He is editor and columnist at www.SoulTracks.com and heard weekly as "Cornfed" on *The Dave Brown Radio Show.*

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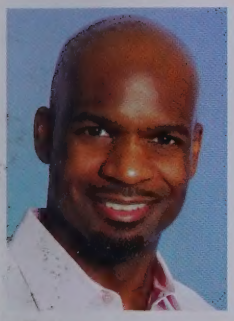

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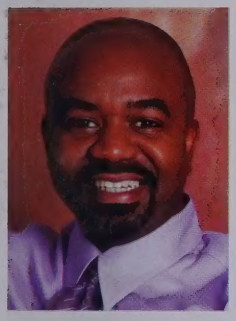

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# From the Editor

It's hard to believe that *SWERV* has been in publication for two years! Sometimes it seems it's been forever and other times it seems like we've just begun. Whichever it may be, it's been a wonderful experience. I have had the honor of meeting and interviewing quite a number of fascinating people within the black LGBT community. And I'm extremely thankful for the many e-mails and letters from our readers expressing their gratitude for sharing these intriguing stories and personalities with our community.

We had the pleasure of hosting our second anniversary event at one of Washington, D.C.'s favorite gay-friendly restaurants, Busboys & Poets. Included in this issue is a fantastic photographic spread of the event showcasing many of our contributors, promotional partners, friends and devout fans. We'd like to thank everyone who attended.

Also in this issue Lisa Joyner talks to veteran rap duo KIN4LIFE about their new song "Lone Ranger"—their contribution to shedding light on the rash of teen suicides.

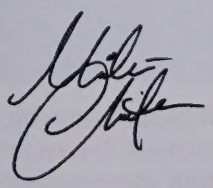
L. Michael Gipson adds to the topic of youth and sexual identity in his piece "Remembrance of War," in which he shares his story and feelings on bullying.

We're happy to add to the ranks writer Alyce Emory who featured Adriane Ferguson, owner of Harlem hot spot, Billie's Black, as well as writer Chloe Hodge, who explores the world of polyamory, or multiple love.

I have the pleasure of introducing the uniqueness of singer/actor/dancer Jelani Maleeq and his upcoming music release, *The Last Sons of Planet 3D.*

Last but not least, on the cover and inside fashion spread we feature gorgeous garments from House of KAS.

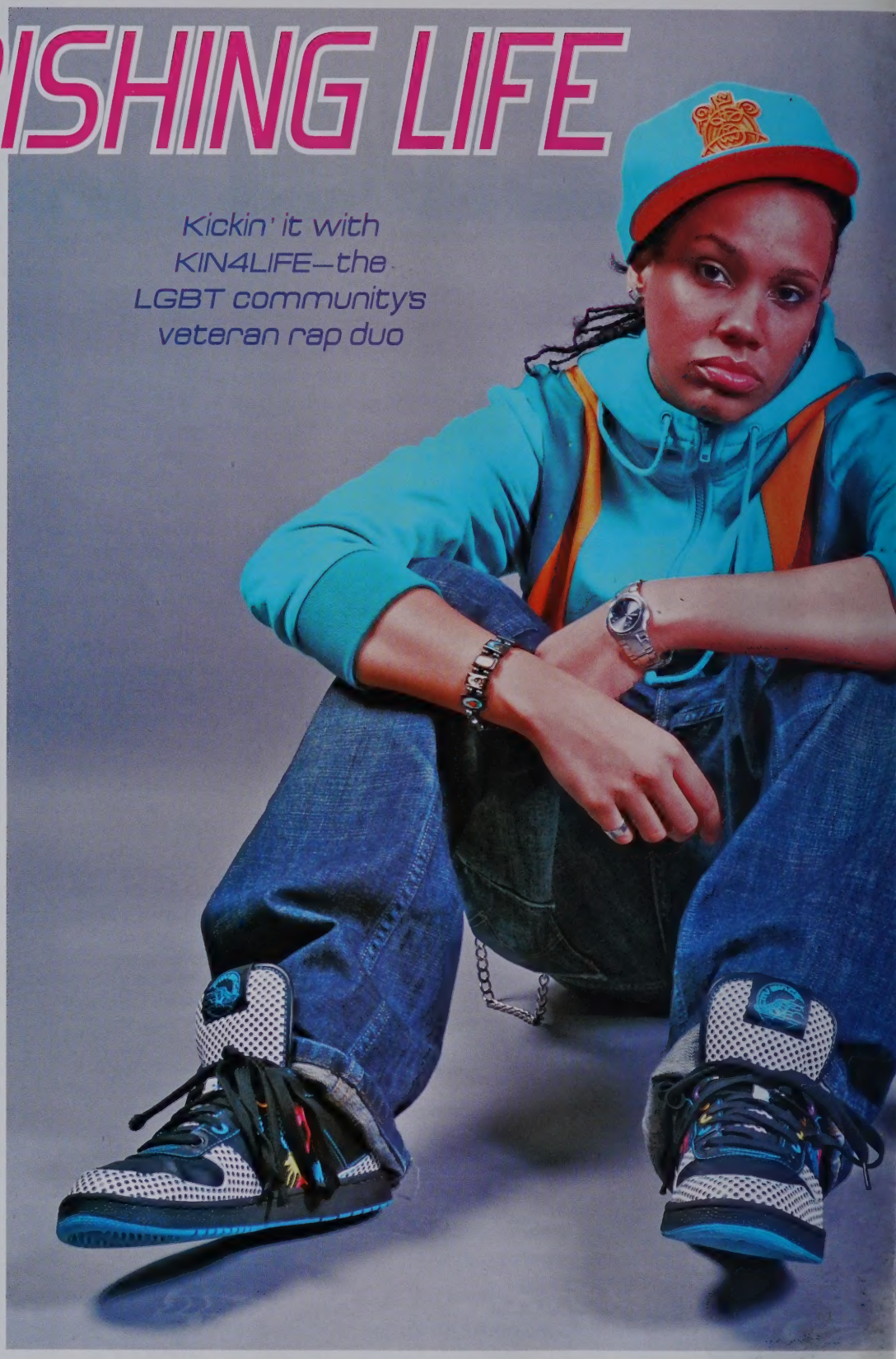
Of course there's so much more in our spring issue of *SWERV.* Again, thanks for supporting us and enjoy the read.



Michael-Christopher
Editor-in-Chief

# CHERISHING LIFE

Words/Lisa Joyner



*Kickin' it with KIN4LIFE—the LGBT community's veteran rap duo*

Turn on any pop music station today and you will hear numerous records by artists who are offering voices to support the LGBT community in the fight against bullying and the recent increase in suicides of gay youth. Most are not clearly identified as statements until you view the videos: Marsha Ambrosius' "Far Away," Pink's "Raise Your Glass," Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," Ke$ha's "We Are Who We Are," and Katy Perry's "Firework." Even *The New York Times* has published an article regarding this influx of music: "For Gays, New Songs of Survival."

Many in the LGBT community appreciate that these mainstream musicians have taken up a sword in our honor, but we must also give props to LGBT musicians who have waged war front and center on the battlefield for years. Too many times their messages of hope, acceptance and freedom have been unknown or unacknowledged.

KIN4LIFE is a 20-something duo (comprised of IQ and Nor) that has been creating music in and for the LGBT community for more than 11 years. With song credits on two movies (*Family*, directed by Faith Trimel, and the upcoming *Changing the Dream*, directed by Rel Dowdell); an appearance in the movie, *black./womyn.: conversations*, directed by Tiona.m.; and a feature in *OUT Magazine*, KIN4LIFE is a growing cult among African-American LGBT '80s babies.

I caught up with KIN4LIFE to discuss their most recent song, "Lone Ranger," written as a message of support to LGBT youth and released in December 2010.

IQ and Nor ("neither here nor there") are a bit adamant about using their alias; they grew up in Mount Vernon, N.Y. and share the same first name. Today KIN4LIFE live in the metro Atlanta area and have been touring for the last seven years. When asked about their residential choice (ATL vs. NYC) IQ says, "It's not *not* New York City; it's the median of house prices in Georgia." She continues, "As soon as we moved they started booking us like crazy in New York, so it's kinda like we didn't

"I was a fan of what IQ was doing. I wanted to be in a group with her so bad; she was the dopest female MC I'd ever heard. I was plotting on her the same way she was plotting on me."
Photo courtesy of KIN4LIFE

leave." Nor adds, "We are used to getting on the road and doing performances we can reach via car, and Atlanta has been a blessing because we get booked in all kinds of places; University of Alabama, South Carolina and Toronto."

Prior to forming KIN4LIFE, IQ and Nor were artists doing their solo thing. In 1999, IQ, then a teenager, presented a contract to Nor, and they began to work together. "I wanted to be her manager," recalls IQ. "The type of songs that we write together, she was writing at 14." The feeling is apparently mutual, because Nor counters, "I was a fan of what IQ was doing. I wanted to be in a group with her so bad; she was the dopest female MC I'd ever heard. I was plotting on her the same way she was plotting on me." IQ interjects, "The best part is we really were family before the music. KIN4LIFE. It just was right."

They are jacks-of-all-trades: singers, songwriters, producers and engineers, and for years they managed their own music. "We had to be self-sufficient," Nor recalls. "We taught ourselves to be self-starters and to take matters in our own hands, and when we joined forces it became double trouble." She continues, "We were pretty much in control the majority of our career until recently. Then we came across our manager, Artists First (Melody Forrester). When you find someone you can fully trust, that is who should be your manager. If you can't trust the person, they don't need to manage anything for you."

KIN4LIFE seem to be overcoming great hurdles while moving through a community (hip hop) that shuns homosexuality and objectifies women. "Our sexuality wasn't really an issue," IQ says. "The first part of our career we were like little tomboys, and no one thought we were straight, anyway. We never talked about it; we just did music. When it came to the point that we were ready for representation, we never had the discussion. They had to kinda work around it, because we were already who we were: a fully formed group.

"We also had the powers because we didn't have any producers," IQ continues. "The music that you hear in 'Lone Ranger,' we produced that. There were less people to tell us what we need to do, because we came with the full package. It wasn't really a factor, because we had the

control. Like coming out on PBS's *In the Life*; it has basically been for us to handle."

KIN4LIFE's single "Lone Ranger" was written by IQ and Nor then recorded with Neftunes, Tora Torres and Studology101. The lyrics are a generational hand of support and hug listeners on the verge. By combining hip hop and R&B, KIN4LIFE achieve their intended goal.

*Jeremy's spoken, it's not over/You don't have to pull that gun out the holster/You don't have to pop them pills in excess/You don't have to wish your life turns to death/ I got you - stop you/with everything in me/I'm not preaching/Need you to stand with me/Been where you been/Stood in your shoes/Tears burned my cheek from the words that they spewed/It gets better or whether there's clouds and storms, tsunamis that probably feel ten years long/On the other side of that you'll feel 10 times stronger/Promise that the sun shines longer*

"We'd been affected by what was going on over the past few months leading up to the young man jumping off the George Washington bridge," IQ says, "'cause all of the places are close to home, and the kid that caused him to jump off the bridge was from Princeton. My girlfriend is from Princeton."

She pauses and continues, "As we looked into it, we noticed that everyone was running to the "It Gets Better" campaign. All the talk shows were talking about it, but I knew in my heart of hearts that it would only last for two months—when they get over the media hype—because we've been going through this for years. I also noticed that a lot of the media was minus of females [lesbians] and people of color as well. What we wanted to do was, after the hype, have the song come out to keep the conversation going."

*I'm riding on this road/I'm a lone ranger/ I feel all alone/I feel like a stranger*
*I'm riding on this road/I'm a lone ranger/ I feel all alone/I feel like a stranger*

"We do a weekly show on UStream and our fans call in, and we know it is affecting our fan base so hardcore," IQ says. Nor adds, "We had a show last night and heard that someone just committed suicide. It is something that is happening on a daily basis, but you're just not hearing about it."

*I was looking at the news today/Another young person passed away/Couldn't bear to stay another day/So they chose to take their life away/I know it's hard when you feel trapped/But what you're doing there's no coming back/No more sipping on your favorite juice/No more listening to your favorite tracks*

"We just wanted to do a record to shed light on [suicides of gay youth] and to collaborate with other artists to bring their voices and opinions to the record." Nor says. "When you work with people who understand what you're trying to do musically and they put their spin on it, it just makes the record a lot bigger and more people can relate. We worked with Tora Torres, Nefertiti [and the Neftunes] and Studology101. It came out to be a really great record that has been touching everyone who has heard it."

"Nor and I knew," says IQ. "We got in the studio and worked on the track first, produced it, wrote it—the hook and everything, and then we looked at each other and knew the hook needed the country soulful voice of Nef. Then we had to bring these voices together so they can really feel the angst. I needed them to hear the sorrow in the song and needed Tora to bring it back, because she has a sweet angelic voice, to remind in the end that it will be ok. We needed to make it bigger and better to reach more ears."

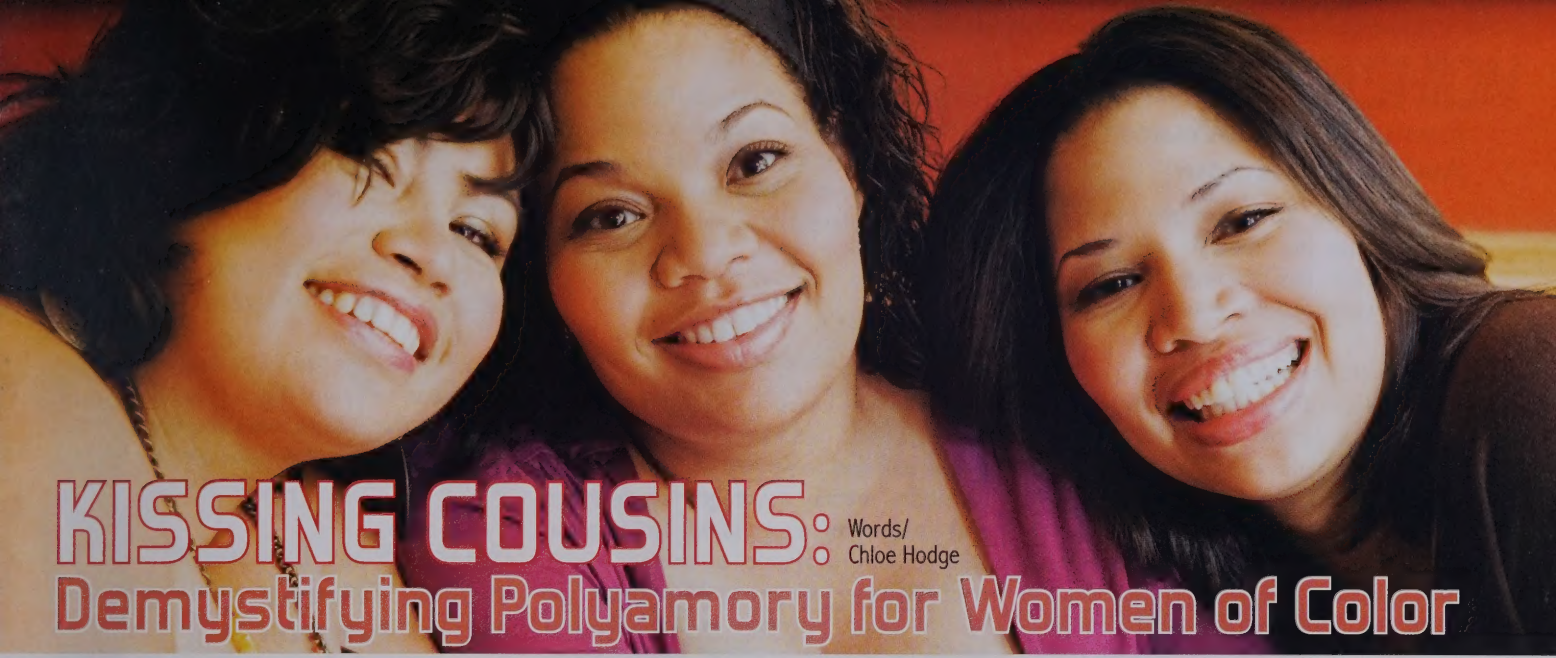
What they did was create a piece of music that has touched many. Within a couple of weeks "Lone Ranger" had over 1,100 downloads and received accolades through various online articles. By writing the song and being available during their live weekly shows on UStream.tv they are reaching young audiences around the world.

KIN4LIFE next would like to take fans on a journey to *Planet Noriq* (pronounced NOR-ik). *Planet Noriq* is KIN4LIFE's record label, a mixed CD and, according to IQ, "It is now a movement. ...It is putting people on the planet where we are, because we are somewhere else; we're not on Earth." She explains, "Instead of thinking of it as a record label, we are thinking of it as another planet, a whole other dimension. We are so far advanced. Everything we've done in our career has always been forward thinking, and then we sit back years later and watch people do things we did four years ago."

Nor picks up where IQ left off. "We're telling everybody to get on board and be a part of the movement. We believe that we are pacemakers and role models for youngsters coming up in the music scene. We dropped 'Make Up Girl' in 2008, and everybody's still trying to re-create that video. We respect that we are role models, and now everybody feels confident declaring their sexuality and being strong. We wanted to tell them that on Planet Noriq it's not about your sexuality.

"The reason why KIN4LIFE has had such longevity and [durability] is because we focus on the talent, music and art of it," Nor says, "and then we just happen to be gay. That's the only way we got into publications like *OUT Magazine*, because you know they don't give our folks a chance. We're trying to tell the youth, yes, be proud of us, be who you are; but don't let pride control and overtake who you are. Let people get to know everything that you are—and on Planet Noriq you can be everything that you are, not just one thing."

Check out KIN4LIFE's tour schedule and download "Lone Ranger" and other songs at www.reverbnation/kin4life.com, www.kin4life.com (free downloads), and iTunes.



# KISSING COUSINS: Demystifying Polyamory for Women of Color

Words/ Chloe Hodge

The girl meets girl story has changed a little. Girl meets girl at poetry reading/ potluck/ concert. Girl buys girl drink and compliments girl's swag/smile. Girl admires girl's... allure. She says, "call me tonight if you're free." Girl waits two days and calls; she has a list of things to talk about to sound endearing/clever/sexy. All familiar until girl interjects: "I'm in love, my partner knows, and I'm just looking to have fun."

This is not some joke against single lesbians everywhere. Instead, this is the beginning of conversations in LGBT communities around the country. The above scenario has happened in various versions across age, socioeconomic status and culture.

Slang, 28, works in security and also drums for a popular Washington, D.C. band, Champion Coolots. She and her partner are in an open relationship, committed to each other emotionally and allowed to pursue physical relationships with other women.

"We've found that honesty is the best policy with our other partners, per se. I make it very clear that I'm in love. This is what it is. I like you but if you *wanna*," she euphemizes, "whatever, we can do that. But there's nothing you can do to tear me away from mine." Slang and her partner have sustained their relationship in an open context for the past year, and it's been just as exhilarating as it's been a learning experience.

She and her partner set rules: a veto power, where either partner can say no to a potential lover, or ask to end that side relationship. No kissing. And no oral. Their parameters have yielded results in exploration and a new definition of commitment and what it means to be faithful. They keep emotions out of their affairs: Slang says she can't compartmentalize her heart; it belongs to her woman, alone. But as they are both young, there's room to change tradition. "There are a lot less rules [in polyamory] and I think it helps us define our own rules. Especially in our community, we try so hard to mirror heterosexual... the whole dynamic... I think this helps us recreate what it means to be in this life."

## In This Polyamory Life

Polyamory is "ethical nonmonogamy," or engaging in loving, intimate relationships with more than one person—based upon the knowledge and consent of everyone involved," according to a definition in *Newsweek* magazine.

But really, it's whatever a nonmonogamous person makes it. The girl from the bookstore/open mic/potluck has two options now. She can either hang up, or explore a new dimension of love. She would not be the last, but she certainly is not the first. A popular, renegade article, "Defining Our Own Sexual Liberation," written by Ignacio Rivera and YK Hung, fills a void for the voice of queer people of color in polyamorous literature.

First published in 2005, the article defines polyamory not only as an alternative lifestyle, but a quintessential, revolutionary act: "We are initially taught that a family is a man and a woman married with children. Even now, family values are being challenged as being queer people with children, but perhaps we need to think about breaking from the framework of conventional structures altogether… Nonmonogamy is political to us because it strives to break from social constructions of what it means to be in any kind of relationship with another person or persons. It also aims to break from the mentality of 'I own you,' which we believe comes from a capitalist idea of ownership and property."

Neither anti-love, nor anti-relationship, the advocates attest that "poly" is simply a matter of thinking, "different." This pioneer work has opened the road for poly women like Natalie Patrice Tucker. Since the age of 17, she knew she wasn't the monogamous type; she wasn't interested in being anyone's only one. There have been exceptions, but ultimately the 34-year-old Brooklyn-based, web accessibility consultant is in a delicious space right now. She knows what she wants, and she has access to a community of women/people/revolutionaries who want the same.

There are e-mail lists, organizations, meetup groups, and even conferences dedicated to providing support to poly people. Web sites like www.unmarried.org and www.lovemore.com are readily available to provide legal and love advice to growing populations of poly families. Grateful for the Internet, Tucker contends that people no longer have to "grapple in the dark." There are support systems willing and waiting to embrace them. But despite the networking, resources and press coverage, misconceptions are rampant, and for some women, it's just not their style.

[continued next page]

## Playa, Playa? Polyamory. It Ain't for Everybody

Enter the girl from the bookstore: What makes her special? she wonders. What about her soulmate? What will she do when Natalie doesn't answer the phone?

Natalie tries to avoid these particular conversations for her own comfort level, preferring a partner who is familiar with the lifestyle and most importantly, the language. "It's a lot of work to sort of train/teach," she says. "There's a whole conversation/nuance around negotiating and making requests and being in communication about things like emotions and sexual health. You know, what is it to be honest? How do you deal with jealousy? How do you make enough room for each other without suffocating or abandoning or anything? For people to jump into that without a lot of hemming and hawing... that's a lot more fun for me."

To Tucker, there are as many examples of polyamory as there are people in it. People can be in a relationship and all parties involved have the option of being lovers. Or it can be exclusive, in which one woman is the hub and she sustains multiple relationships. There's the idea of having a primary partner whom you build a home with, share finances and live with. There's much to learn and negativity to combat.

Misconception No. 1: Polyamory is synonymous with promiscuity. Tucker does not sleep around and safety is a priority.

Misconception No. 2: Just because a relationship is open, or a woman is poly, means there's something missing in that primary coupling. Wrong!

Misconception No. 3: Polyamory is a permanent situation. Rather, people can move in and out of polyamory, just as quickly and effortlessly as a hairstyle. Moving from a poly to a monogamous relationship happens. And for the poly woman on the other end, like Tucker, hearts are still broken.

"Folks who don't tend to do poly are like, 'What are you talking about?! You have four other lovers!' But I let you into my life because I like you," says Tucker. "The quantity of people doesn't have anything to do with it... That's the thing about poly: We get to be real about the fact that things are always shifting and we negotiate that on a moment by moment basis, instead of assuming that I'm gonna love you forever. And it does hurt, it does hurt when relationships shift or dissolve; it's intense."

## Gay & Poly. Another Political Dilemma?

Colorado-based Loving More Organization works to increase the awareness and visibility of poly people. Through media coverage, conferences and magazines they make information and support available to masses. With over 40 issues of *Loving More* magazine in circulation, coverage on MSNBC and Michael Baisden's *After Dark* series, Loving More's executive director, Robyn Trask, continues working for the polyamorous community.

The most important thing to her, simply, is the word "polyamory" itself. She defends it: "As much as we say we don't wanna be labeled, it's not so much a label as it is a description to describe who I am. Instead of saying I'm nonmonogamous, we have a word."

For some, that word poses a problem. Currently five states recognize same-sex marriage and the idea of polyamory negates the movement for more states to follow suit. While there's vehement opposition, there's also no support from LGBT leaders. "We're on a slippery slope, as it fuels people not to support gay marriage," Trask says. "So some people are 'triggered' and it's been difficult getting support. Even though so many gay and lesbian people are poly, [same-sex relationships are] kind of a dichotomy and interesting to deal with."

The girl from the bookstore is unconcerned with politics. She just thought the girl was cute. She's read the books. She saw it in a movie. And she still has questions, real questions. How does her family life influence the possibilities of poly? And didn't she always dream about being a pimp? She decides, ultimately, she's not down to be a surface-level affair. But maybe, just maybe, she can start a few of her own.

## Polyamorous Literature

**"Defining Our Own Sexual Liberaton,"** by Ignacio Rivera and YK Hung (pdf available online)

***The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open Relationships & Other Adventures***, by Dossie Easton (Celestial Arts)

***Open: Love, Sex, and Life in an Open Marriage***, by Jenny Block (Seal Press)

***Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships***, by Tristan Taormino (Cleis Press)

## Helpful Poly Language: Words, Terms and Ways to Avoid Confusion

**Polyamory**—Ethical nonmonogamy, in which multiple romantic relationships are sustained with the consent of all involved.

**Open Relationship**—A romantic relationship where either partner is allowed to pursue other *solely* physical or "surface" affairs with other women.

**Swinging**—Generally, recreational activity where couples engage in sex with each other.

**Polygamy**—The practice or custom of simultaneously having more than one wife, or husband.

**Polyandry**—A specific polygamy where a woman has more than one husband.

**Primary Partner**—For open and poly relationships, the partner with whom family, expenses and usually living situation are shared.

**Inclusive Polyamory**—A polyamorous situation where all lovers involved are open and available to one another for romantic relationships. Time is spent with all people involved as a family.

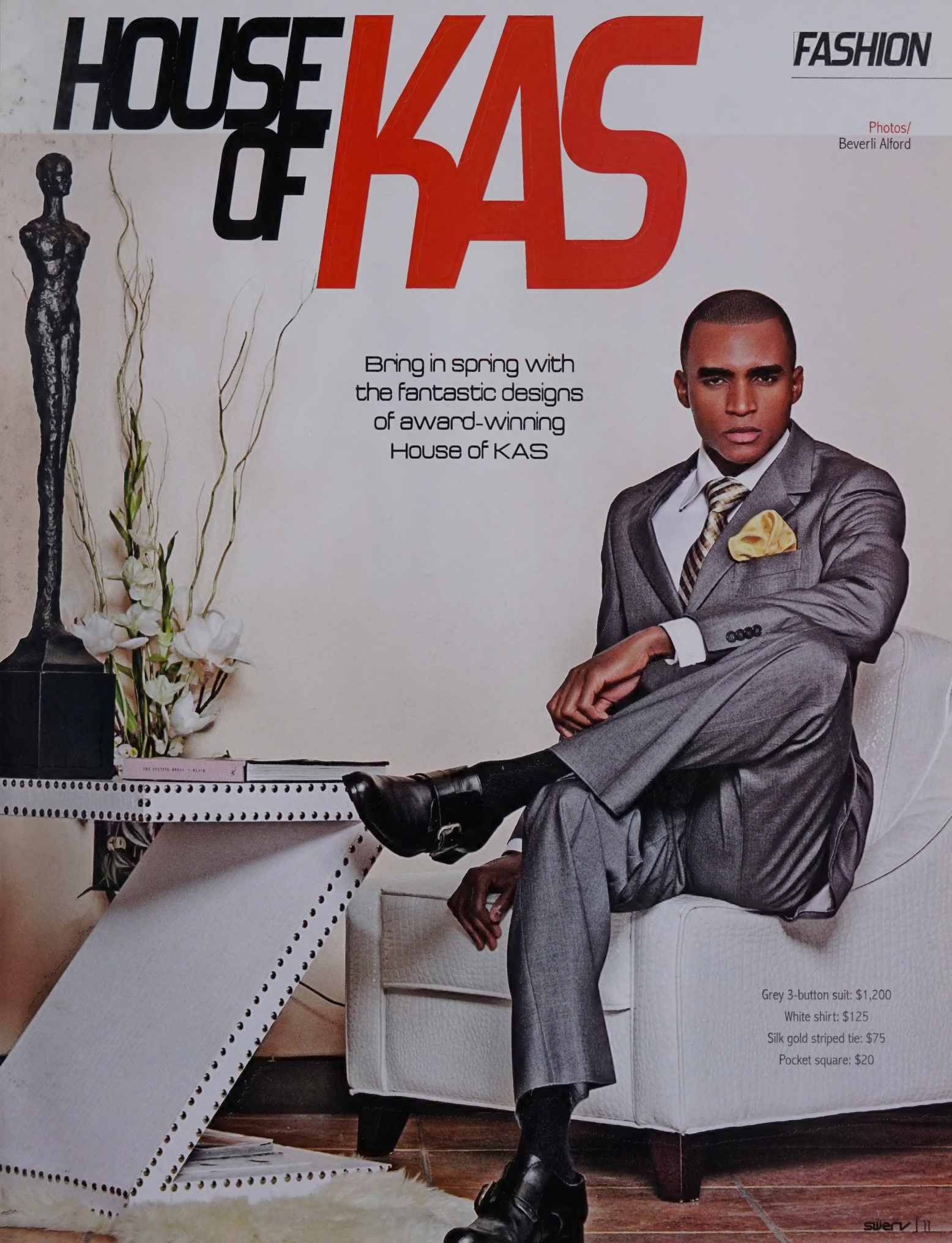
**Exclusive Polyamory**—A polyamorous situation where one person serves as the hub and maintains multiple lovers. These lovers do not sleep, or necessarily friend each other. They only deal with this core woman. They may or may not be the core woman for others.

**Fluid Bonding Agreement**—Common in inclusive poly relationships, an agreement in which sexual partners acknowledge the dismissal of condoms and other safe sex devices in exchange for perfect monogamy to the group.

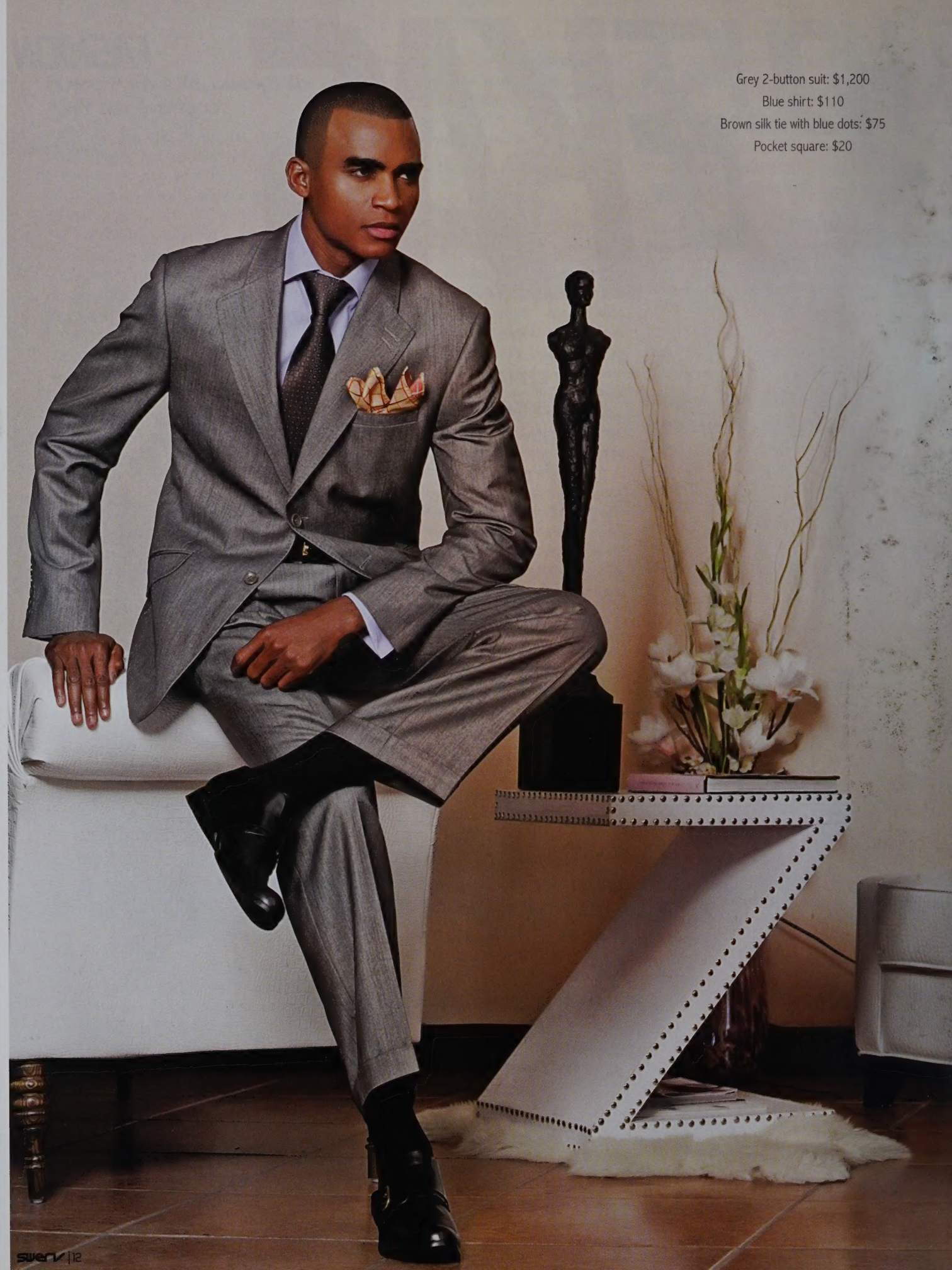
# HOUSE OF KAS

Photos/
Beverli Alford

Bring in spring with the fantastic designs of award-winning House of KAS



Grey 3-button suit: $1,200
White shirt: $125
Silk gold striped tie: $75
Pocket square: $20


Grey 2-button suit: $1,200
Blue shirt: $110
Brown silk tie with blue dots: $75
Pocket square: $20

Multi-colored, back out mermaid gown: $2,000

Necklace: $100

Gold bangles: $50

Grey pinstripe suit: $1,500
High-collar white shirt: $150
Silk paisley ascot tie and pocket square: $120
Cuff links: $100
Tan shingle beaded dress: $750

# House of KAS

KAS Collection Inc. is a high-end couture fashion company which specializes in sophisticated evening wear, stylish business suits for men and women and high-fashion urban apparel. Founded by Kenneth "KAS" Flanagan, a self-taught designer with an aesthetic that is timeless, KAS Collection has established itself as unique and visionary. In 2006, KAS signed an agreement with Saks Fifth Avenue making him the first African-American male couture designer to have his clothes showcased and sold in their stores.

Over the years, Flanagan has developed an exclusive clientele ranging from political figures to entertainment and sports superstars. He has received numerous awards for his talents including the 2004 International Designer of the Year Award. Flanagan opened his first flagship store, House of KAS, at the upscale National Harbor in Oxon Hill, Md.

KAS Collection
www.kascollectioninc.com

# CONVERSATIONS

## *With Sundiata Alayé*

## Brusied...But Not Broken

Photo/James Hicks

It's been well over 10 years since I released my last book, and I still don't know where the time went. Admittedly, I've been off the scene but I've not been on the sidelines sitting idly by. I've been very busy nurturing myself, my children, my career, a new love, and writing new works that I'm launching this spring. I've really had my hands full.

But my absence has been both a blessing and curse. I have witnessed changes in the world I never thought I'd see. "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" has been repealed, and same-sex marriages have been legalized in some states and the District of Columbia. It's been amazing to see! On the other hand, we are living through one of the worst economic crises of our time, and many of us are losing homes and jobs, and struggling financially to make ends meet.

Indeed the world is in crisis, but perhaps the most disturbing crisis of all is the continued surge in the rate of HIV infection among us. Unbelievable! HIV continues to skyrocket among same-gender-loving men of color. It's a painful realization after everything we've gone through since the arrival of HIV on the scene over 25 years ago. Given all that we've witnessed and survived through these many years, I am as amazed as I am disappointed to see that we're continuing to act out our pain and our self-hatred through unprotected sex—only now on a much grander scale.

The Internet has given us an opportunity to connect in love, truth and commonality through dating sites, chat rooms, blogs, podcasts and other social media to a world of same-gender-loving brothers and sisters. Sadly, what had the potential to become a common ground has turned into a battleground. Everything the Internet was meant to be has given way to an overabundance of porn, and sex hookup sites, and live on-camera actions too numerous to mention. These sensations tend to move our consciousness away from the spirit of a man to the body of a man, and stir up sexual desires. The screen names and profiles, though sometimes creative and sincere, largely scream out our pain and our insecurities, self-hatred and prejudices against each other. And we're not advertising the truth about our HIV status as we advertise our desire for immediate sex hookups. Our use of the Internet for sex hookups has become an addiction, and now our addictions have placed us all in jeopardy. In many ways our use of this technology has surpassed our humanity.

We've been stumbling around in a very dark age for the last 20 years since AIDS hit the scene, and though we've never really had too much to say about HIV among us, a very uncomfortable and chilling hush has fallen over us today. We're having little to no conversations about our sexual health with each other and we're now experiencing a rise in sexually transmitted diseases, including new HIV infections. Washington, D.C. alone boasts a rate as high as 1 in 3 black men infected with HIV. And those are only the ones we know of. Something is so wrong with this.

The experience of unprotected (raw) sex, group sex and indiscriminate sexual encounters has taken over our natural desire for self-preservation. Unbelievably, we are now repeating the same mistakes of our immediate past and HIV is wreaking havoc on us once again. Many of us are still not being tested, and although some have taken this step to know their status, they are in such denial that not even a positive diagnosis is enough to keep them from participating in raw sexual activities. Although a strict regimen of lifetime medications is available to manage the disease, there is still no cure. What is often unknown or ignored is that these medications can become ineffective as people with HIV continue to become re-infected by HIV-infected sex partners.

Indeed, drug treatments are available but difficult to adhere to and challenging on the body. The disease, to a certain extent, can be controlled. But what is controlling our minds is our individual and collective pain; our self-hatred, undiagnosed depression; internalized homophobia; alcohol, drugs and the nonstop pursuit of sex. HIV cannot be reversed, at least not now, but the way that we think about ourselves, each other and our precious lives can be.

We're using sex in ways it was not meant to be used. We use it not for the spiritual enlightenment and the physical pleasure it brings, but rather to validate our need to feel wanted, desired and loved, and we need this validation because deep down we don't really feel it ourselves. We need others to do it for us; even if it's a perfect stranger and if only for a moment.

What does this tell us? It tells us that our *minds* are more diseased than our bodies. HIV doesn't come to us. We keep coming to it. We invite it to us by not protecting ourselves. We're practically begging for it when we have unprotected sex, and there are reasons for this that cannot simply be dismissed as "I'm just a freak." There is a deeper pain inside that allows us to place our lives and the lives of others in jeopardy, and we have an urgent responsibility to discover what that is.

We're wounded, and wounded people wound other people. But we're not bad people because we have wounds. Our wounds are merely the places in us where we hurt the most. Only by addressing the issues that cause the pain can we cure the pain. One thing is for certain: We can no longer continue to use sex as a substitution for our pain. This simply has to stop.

You may not be able to do this on your own. Seeking counseling or support groups is a magnificent way of helping you to address your issues. Please seek out counselors in your area; one who will be able to offer you safe, nonjudgmental counseling to help you elevate to a new reality.

There is crisis in our community—a medical crisis and a crisis of consciousness. And we're overdue for a change. Our pain is evident but then so is a new reality—if you want it. We are not that far down the road to correct this. Make a commitment to get tested today and protect yourself at all costs. Treat everyone as though they are HIV-positive until you know differently. Knowing is loving. Knowing is living. Admittedly, we're bruised... but we're not broken.

Peace, Blessings, Light, Love,

*Sundiata Alayé*

# BILLIE'S BLACK

Words/Alyce Emory
Photo/Ricky Day

*Former real estate agent Adriane Ferguson gives in to divine intervention and follows family tradition to open Harlem's gay-owned hot spot, Billies Black.*

Adriane Ferguson, longtime Harlem resident and businesswoman, shares her experiences as the owner of one of Harlem's best and increasingly popular gathering places, Billie's Black Bar/Lounge/Restaurant.

***SWERV: Hey there. So tell us who you are.***
Adriane Ferguson: I'm originally from Harlem, N.Y., and I am the proprietor and chef of Billie's Black gourmet soul food restaurant. Billie's Black opened in June of 2006 and we've been here four and a half years.

***SWERV: What brought you to open a restaurant?***
AF: My grandmother had a business making desserts so I became familiar and friendly with the kitchen at age 11. From this, I learned how to make many family dishes and that, along with my many trips to the Caribbean, inspired and encouraged me to venture out and see what I could do with this gift. In my early 20s, I hosted various parties and discovered that attendance grew larger and larger, which was something I hadn't expected. The next thing I knew I was cooking for more and more people...sometimes 200!

***SWERV: Two hundred people? Did you have an industrial-sized kitchen for that?***
AF: (laughs) No, I did this all in my home kitchen!

***SWERV: Wow! How did you manage?***
AF: Well, I found out that it's all in the planning and preparing, so I'd plan the menu, list out what I needed to purchase, how much time to prep ingredients, cooking times, equipment needed, everything! All of this helped me get the dishes prepared quickly and the guests served in good time. If you know who you're serving and

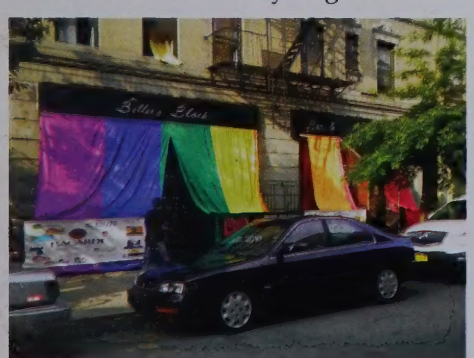
love what you do, then that makes the work easier and very satisfying. Also, the first time I walked into a nightclub something said to me, "Wow, someone owns and runs this business and maybe I could do the same." Throughout years of living life and being young and free and having fun, it stuck with me that a club and restaurant business could be a serious business opportunity for me. Once I made that connection, that's when I knew I wanted to do this for the rest of my life.

***SWERV: Why open a place in Harlem?***

AF: Harlem is what I know from growing up here and still living here. Actually, the spot where I am (271 W. 119th St.) really chose me. Before opening Billie's Black, I worked in the real estate profession. One day a customer came to our office looking to sell his property, which turned out to be this location. Now, what's funny is I had two weeks prior told my boss that I was considering looking at a commercial space to buy. And so by divine intervention the property owner, who was in serious dire straits, came to our office eager to sell. He and I talked, made the deal, and so here I am.

***SWERV: Divine intervention indeed! Once all this happened and you got the keys, were you scared?***

AF: I slept and pondered over what happened in a meeting with the former owner, and although I was scared, I was still excited and confident that this major step was right for me. When I got the keys, I was nervous and everything seemed at that time to be surreal. From start to finish this was a tremendous leap of faith for something I had considered every angle on and hoped for, so when this became real, it was intimidating—but I pressed on anyway. So often we talk ourselves out of something that we want to do because of our fear. I believe and am living proof that once you conquer your sense of fear, everything else is gravy and can come to you. But you must take those first steps, and then confidently follow it with others.



Exterior photos courtesy of Billie's Black

***SWERV: That's inspiring. Where does the name "Billie's Black" come from?***

AF: Billie was my mother and the "Black" in "Billie's Black" is an affirmation of our black culture and African-American heritage. I have a picture of my mother on the wall here; it's actually a photo embossed on a blanket. It was such a unique gift... So she's here with me and our customers all the time. Very inspiring.

***SWERV: What's the best thing about owning a business in Harlem?***

AF: The best thing for me is that the customers know who I am. I'm not an absentee owner so they can come to me, talk to me and give me their critiques. I'm here all the time and, when I can, my managers and I chat with customers; we enjoy it. I love seeing regulars and new customers enjoying the Billie's Black experience, and then they bring friends and family to share the positivity. It's a wonderful cycle!

***SWERV: What's the biggest challenge?***

AF: Right now, the biggest challenge is with smaller Harlem businesses not getting the same kind of support and media attention as their larger, more deeply pocketed, "media-friendly" counterparts do. With Harlem becoming a new playground for the rest of the world, more attention is being placed on our community, especially where entertainment is concerned. Many newer Harlem businesses gain more media attention than smaller established ones that have been here longer and have weathered the challenges of times. Unfortunately, these seasoned businesses also often get passed over when the business resources are allotted, and that can often be the difference between success and failure. I believe there should be more equitable good faith outreach to ensure the smaller Harlem businesses are included so they can acquire these same resources and notoriety as their trendy, media-friendly counterparts.

***SWERV: Billie's has become a welcoming gathering place for us in the LGBT community. Was that a personal goal for you?***

AF: Honestly, that wasn't the goal; even though I knew we'd be a gay-owned business, that wasn't going to be the forefront of our positioning. There was never an instance where I was going to be apologetic for Billie's being gay-owned and gay-friendly. One of my colleagues has told me that Billie's Black and myself are deemed as part of an activism entity within the New York and Harlem LGBT community, and I'm fine with that.

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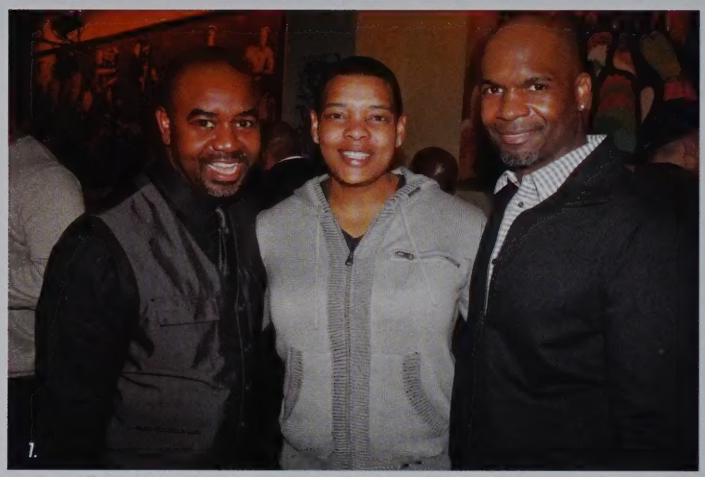
# SECOND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Photos/Julius Prince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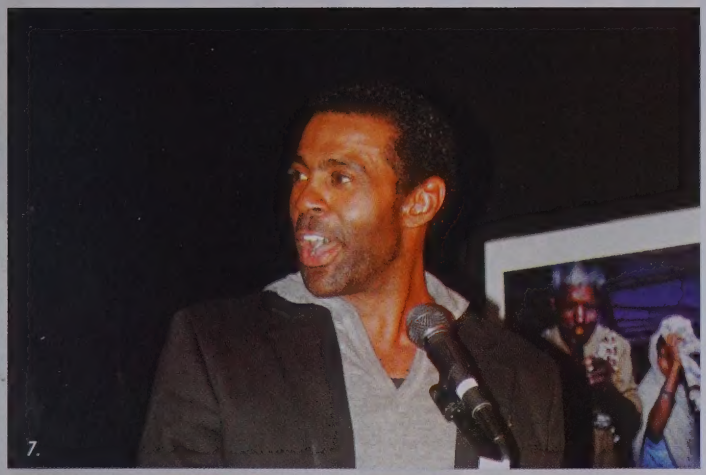
**SWERV Magazine celebrated its 2nd Anniversary at Busboys & Poets restaurant in Washington, D.C. February 17, 2011. Here are some of the highlights.**

*1. SWERV co-publisher Jamil Fletcher, Lina Thompson, SWERV co-publisher & editor-in-chief Michael-Christopher. 2. SWERV contributor Chloe Hodge with Stacey Long of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. 3. (2nd from left) Scott Wallace and SWERV contributor Lisa Joyner and friend. 4. Jamil Fletcher, Charlotte, Rayceen Pendarvis, and Xavier Cole, Mr. Black America. 5. Al-Sura president Rahim Briggs. 6. Michael-Christopher and Veronica Fountain of Sugar & Spice Travel. 7. SWERV contributor and author Sundiata Alayé. 8. Keith O. Royal of X-Clusive Images with Michael-Christopher and Jamil Fletcher. 9. Shari & friend. 10. (3rd from left) Blogger Xem Van Adams and comedian and author Sampson (r) and friends. 11. Michael-Christopher and friend with Jamil Fletcher and Shiqueeta Lee. 12. SWERV model Chris Deloatch and Rahim Briggs. 13. Joe and Derrick. 14. Raul and friend.*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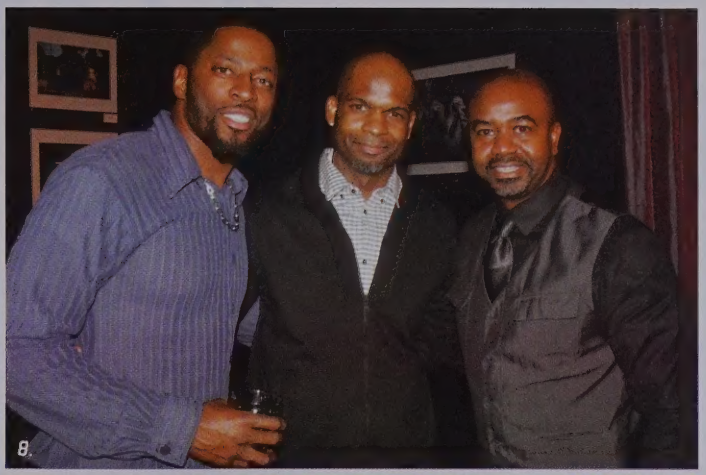
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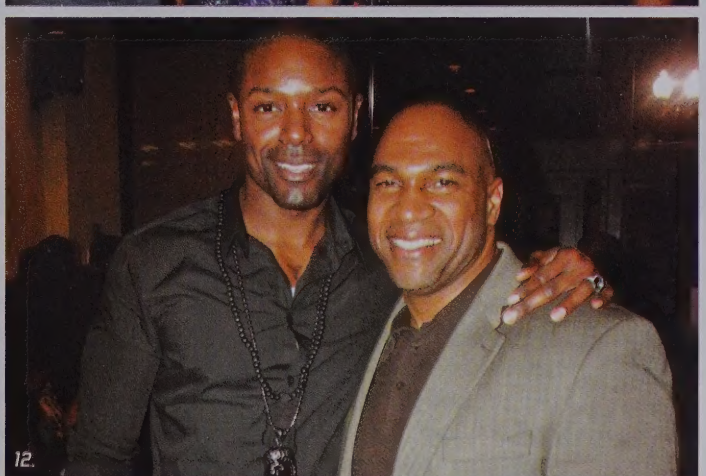
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# JELANI MALEEQ

## Brotha from Another Planet

Words/Michael-Christopher

Photo/Brice Daniels
Hair & Color/James Tracey Hadden

To look at singer/performer Jelani Maleeq most would never suspect that he attended private school, studied ballet at age 5 and starred in a variety of musicals, plays and commercials in his 20-something years on this planet. The Queens, N.Y., native would more readily be mistaken for a linebacker than an entertainer, but there's much more to this man than meets the eye. While he's not new to the world of performing, Maleeq is definitely bringing something new to the table in the form of his upcoming EP, *The Last Sons of Planet 3D*, a cleverly thought-out concept album that could serve as a soundtrack for a science fiction movie.

"I've been dancing pretty much all my life," Maleeq says, recalling his early days. His grandmother enrolled him in ballet class around the same time he began kindergarten; she claims he could sing and dance as soon as he could walk and talk. Maleeq continued on until age 12. "It was rough being in an African-American neighborhood and being the only kid who couldn't play football and basketball because you had to go to take ballet classes." But his aversion to ballet wasn't really because of teasing; African and hip-hop dance were much more to his liking.

Maleeq's grandmother, who was once lead singer of a swing band *and* an opera singer, gave him vocal lessons until passing the torch to his church choir director. From there he continued to be a part of every performance he could, anywhere he could.

Although Maleeq was an extraordinary talent, he was also quite the mischievous youngster. He managed to get himself kicked out of Catholic school by doing just about everything the rulebook said not to do. "I wasn't the best kid in the world," Maleeq says. "I think it had a lot to do with me not being able to release all of that creative energy." The only academic class that Maleeq enjoyed was English; he was introduced to Shakespeare, which further ignited his acting spirit. He finally got into Francis Lewis High School in Queens, where he majored in choreography and performing arts.

Fresh out of high school, Maleeq got wind of an audition for a production of *Avenue X*. The only catch was that it was in Philadelphia. Not letting distance be the controlling factor, Maleeq got in touch with the stage manager and director and managed

[continued on page 24]

# Creating Pathways to Victory

Words/Clarence* J. Fluker

George Walker

In the spring of 1991 two visionary and politically savvy gay men, Vic Basile and Terry Bean, saw that full equality for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Americans would not and could not be achieved by engaging only legislators and through legislation. They recognized that full equality would be the by-product of full and inclusive representation by those who held public office. With that in mind, they set out on a mission to create a pathway to victory for qualified, out GLBT legislators throughout the country on the local, state and federal levels.

Using the same successful model as EMILY's List, a political action committee devoted to electing pro-choice Democratic women, Basile and Bean created the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund, a nonpartisan, multi-candidate, federal political action committee. This private group works strategically to elect or defeat candidates through recruitment, training and fundraising. When it was created, there were only 49 openly GLBT officials in the country. Since then, the Victory Fund has worked to increase that number to more than 400.

In 1991, Sherry Harris, an African-American lesbian running for city council in Seattle, became the first Victory Fund-endorsed candidate. With help from the Victory Fund and $14,000 raised through their network of donors, she was able to soundly defeat a 24-year incumbent. The first of many important victories for the Victory Fund, Harris became the first openly gay African-American city council member in United States history.

George Walker, vice president of Leadership Initiatives for the Victory Fund, plays an integral part in steering the organization and its leadership development work because he understands the tremendous need for the GLBT community, particularly GLBT people of color, to participate in electoral politics. According to Walker, "People of color have to step up to the plate. We can't sit back and then complain when laws advance with or without us in mind, if we haven't been participants in making things represent our opinions."

Walker continues, "We'd be shooting ourselves in the foot *not* to pay close attention to what is being done and how it affects us. We can play a more active role by showing up to vote, getting involved in contests that are happening in our jurisdictions, advocating for initiatives, by being donors when we have the resources, and supporting candidates with foot work." He recalls that "it wasn't that long ago that we had to really struggle to have a say in government, and I don't want to give it up. We shouldn't give it up."

Giving up is not viewed as an option by African-American GLBT candidates and elected officials following in the footsteps of Sherry Harris. High-profile races over the past few years have included Detroit City Council President Charles Pugh, Marcus Brandon of the North Carolina House of Representatives, and the state of Georgia's Simone Bell, the first openly lesbian African-American state legislator in the United States.

Walker recognizes two challenges facing African-American GLBT candidates. The first is getting the infrastructure to back a race. He defines infrastructure as having the means, money, and energy to win a race. "Historically, we haven't had much money, but we have had the energy," he says. "I think even as we begin to get the money to play in races, we have to keep the political momentum going to stay active and bring energy to campaigns. I am working now with a small group to do something that builds infrastructure for supporting a pipeline of LGBT candidates.

"In some cities it should be a 'no-brainer' to have black LGBT folks in the pipeline, but it hasn't happened yet. We can't keep letting opportunities slip," says Walker. The other big challenge he sees is training, so that potential candidates and those that work on campaigns are aware of what they are in for and what it takes to succeed. "It is vital that people attend trainings like the one done by the Gay & Lesbian Leadership Institute. It really would help us to run more viable campaigns and get realistic about the outcomes for and against us," he says.

The Gay & Lesbian Leadership Institute is the sister nonprofit wing of the Victory Fund; it offers four intensive campaign and candidate trainings annually. During these several daylong trainings, offered throughout the country, participants are educated about best practices by experts and work in teams to prepare campaign road maps for a simulated race. Many participants have gone on to run and win political races. In addition, the Leadership Institute holds an annual international conference for out GLBT elected and appointed officials, and administers a fellowship program in collaboration with the David Bohnett Foundation that offers an opportunity for them to attend the Harvard Kennedy School's Senior Executives in State and Local Government program.

[continued on page 25]

# Remembrance of War

Words/L. Michael Gipson

## A Personal Memoir on Bullying

From the third grade until my sophomore year of high school, I was bullied. Actually, I find "bullied" too genteel—maybe even too muscular—a word for what it conveys. It conjures separate, unattached episodes that can be brushed off rather than the prolonged campaigns of childhood terror I endured. World wars have begun and ended in shorter durations than my time in the "bullying" trenches. No, I believe "terrorism" is the more accurate depiction of what I experienced during those holy wars on schoolyard battlefields.

Though such allusions are melodramatic, I do not use this inflammatory word, "terrorism," to draw undue sympathy for my plight. Truthfully, in the lives of youth worldwide, my experience is frightfully ordinary. Call it an aspect of humanity that has yet to fully experience the fine-tuning of civilization. To be "bullied" is to fear one's own murder being played out against a sweetly ironic backdrop of everyday childhood.

The psychological force of bullying gets lost in our sanitizing national dialogue of zero-tolerance policies and anti-bullying workshops. I think when one usually thinks of bullying they imagine unequal but relatively fair fist fights that may end in bruised skin, loosened teeth; maybe a broken nose. Those who imagine such ABC *After School Specials* have not been bullied. The post-terrorized among us once often thought of murder, ours and that of the bully. These thoughts were so thick in my life they even stalked my dreams.

If murder walked through my nights, self-consciousness dogged my days. On the surface, I was bullied for being effeminate, articulate, overweight, well-read, interested in recreations and matters nontraditional for black boys or even black people—essentially for being myself. There were limited options for sanctuary. Always the glutton, my selected sanctuaries only kept the cycles of abuse turning (something about Harlequin romance and musical theater just begs for a beat down). Refuge could not be found among adults, many of whom viewed bullying as a rite of passage.

The main refuge one loses when being bullied is one's own body. My body became my betrayer. Mistrust promoted constant self-checks: holding schoolbooks to my sides rather than the more comfortable nook of my chest; forcing an artificial bass into faux barbershop banter as I tried to mask the contralto of my voice; the awkward sex jokes; the strained pimp-walking—all feeble attempts to fit in that made my difference that much more transparent to my abusers.

It's not the actual violence that is the worst part of being at the mercy of children's prejudices. It's the happenings in between the episodes of physical assault that most cannibalize the soul. It's the hours spent staring at school clocks, waiting for certain doom. The nervous rhythm of your bouncing knee under the school desk, in triple time to your heart beat. It's the stomach-plunging navigation of halls, where you see gleeful faces of those who will celebrate their well-placed heels and fists later.

But most of all it's the dialogue with yourself that eats you up inside. You move between self-

flagellation and despair to hope and prayers for an act of God to save your face and integrity for one more day. It's what you think to and of yourself that is more corrosive than what bullies actually say to you. Worse than the beatings is the stomach-churning knowledge that despite it all, you still envy them their privilege, still partially desire a place at their table, if only as a respite from the daily disrespect.

Yes, you know they aren't better than you, in theory. Yes, you've heard that they will "get theirs" in time, through some karmic force or universal law. Of course you know that the evil they so casually commit actually makes them worse people than you, and yet… It's the solitary terrorism of the mind, born from a handful of episodes writ large, that makes bullying a 24/7 experience worthy of Dante's poetry. In comparison, the beatings are easy.

The beatings may be even easier than the humiliation. To paraphrase Oprah: "There is nothing worse than humiliation. It rips at the core of one's soul." The constant belittling of one's faith and passions; the degrading of one's body, movements and voice; the devaluing of one's interests and offerings; and the ubiquitous threat of something ominous waiting around life's corners—all are hallmarks of humiliation, be it in war, intimate partner violence or a classroom.

It doesn't even take a particularly creative mind to cultivate a humiliation campaign. Instructions abound in our popular culture, from reality TV shows to *Mean Girls* flicks, where the evildoers are only undone in the last minutes. Locker rigs, toilet head and 3 p.m. deadlines have been supplemented by more sophisticated technology: Humiliation 2.0, comprised of Tweets, Facebook posts, Photoshopped pics, or, as in the case of terrorized Rutgers suicide victim, Tyler Clementi, hidden video.

Those who tortured me in the '80s weren't jocks with trust funds and video cams, though some carried guns and pocketknives. Some were frequenters of juvie, some gang members; others where just higher on our block's social totem pole, if destined to reside on the lower rungs of life. They were the victims of poverty, fatherlessness, crack homes, patriarchal values, hypermasculinity and their own abuse stories... and they were angry about the dawning realization that they'd been set up for a hard climb, if not outright failure. None were preordained to be domestic terrorists. They had support: co-signs from the complicit, such as apathetic teachers, homophobic Christian principals, or crowds determined not to trade places with me. Misdirected anger, faith and fear all colluded to make me and mine survivors, for those of us who did.

Which brings me to what to do for the nearly two-thirds of students who in 2009 reported to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Educator Network (GLSEN) that they feel unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation, and the 39% who reported they felt unsafe because of their gender expression. They feel unsafe because they know they are in a silent war, but are under-equipped for battle. Twenty years after my own tour there's still blood, fear and murderous thoughts plaguing our young. The best we seem to offer so far for this new crop of targets are zero tolerance for those already flirting with prison and who still live in the targets' neighborhood post-expulsion; anti-bullying trainings for ever-faithful educators who themselves may believe LGBT children are an abomination in need of "correction"; and "It Gets Better" social marketing campaigns of hope for tomorrow. But how does one hang on today? How does one endure terror campaigns that can last up to a decade long? Who's doing *that* video and making *that* policy?

> "It's not the actual violence that is the worst part of being at the mercy of children's prejudices. Its the happenings in between the episodes of physical assault that most cannibalize the soul."

Ensuring legal recourse for the afflicted is a just cause, but it is only a bandage, not a cure. Life and terror does exist off the school grid and protection in the streets is guaranteed for none. Besides, many of these policies require youth or witnesses to snitch, an act against the cultural beliefs of some of these very victims. What our youth need is not aspirations that their tour of duty will end at graduation, but sustainable armor. What they need is hope to win now, survival strategies now, self-defense classes now, maps to navigate the landmines littering their block now, guiding hands in the dark pulling them through today—not a far-off hope for retribution through class achievement tomorrow (which isn't guaranteed). Without hope, without training to survive the continuing war against difference, many more than the 30% of students who considered suicide will lose heart; they just may do so later in life, when they realize that some of those bullies become bosses, judges, politicians and pastors—not all of them are pumping gas. Injustice doesn't end at graduation, but is a lifelong condition worth fighting.

The stakes were high 20 years ago, and they are higher still now. As with national anti-terrorism campaigns, nothing less than a counterinsurgency striving to attack the roots, the very foundation of the problem, will do to protect our future. The cures are muscular anti-oppression campaigns that look at the relationships between all the "isms," including anti-individualism, that bring abusers together to commit collective acts of war against us all. A "heart and mind" campaign that understands the origins of abuse and offers reform avenues for abusers to become the allying redeemed. A training campaign that gets our youth prepared to be more than thought and policy activists, but able to physically and psychically defend themselves, too. Unarmed children often become unarmed adults vulnerable to abuse for life by pillagers who fear, disdain and exploit their specialness. Yes, there is a war going on, its victims falling younger and younger. It's time we prepared them for battle.

to get a phone audition, wowing them with his singing and a monologue. "Two days later the director came and picked me up from New York and brought me back down to Philly," he says. After the run of *Avenue X*, Maleeq successfully landed more roles. More than a year later, he headed back home to Queens and continued to work in theater.

In the past couple of years, Maleeq has come to know his voice and his passion for music, and has turned that passion into a plan. Maleeq's new project, *The Last Sons of Planet 3D*, takes what Ne-Yo, Beyoncé and T.I. have been doing with musical alter egos (think: Sasha Fierce) to a whole other level. "I found a way to use my love of R&B and gospel and soul and rap," he says. "I kinda combine all those [genres] to motivate people and put messages in my music and encourage people to live better." Maleeq credits being a comic book geek as the motivation behind the concept of *Planet 3D*: it's a place where its inhabitants are able to separate themselves at will—their good side, bad side and their voice of reason. "Jelani," the R&B crooner, represents love. "Maleeq," the rapper, is always looking for trouble, and "Mr. Thr33d," the voice of reason, is the inspirational side of the trio.

Planet 3D is not some distant world in a galaxy far away; it's actually an alternate Earth in the "multi-verse"—a place where many alternate existences dwell. And on this Earth, technology has been interwoven into DNA, causing infertility. The lab-born inhabitants are irrational, violent and born without "soul energy," making them incapable of love. Wars break out and Mr.Thr33d travels to our Earth to find a way to save his home, but finds this Earth needs saving just as much, if not more. The story will be told in the three voices of Planet 3D's last sons, which should make for very interesting listening. Maleeq plans to release *Planet 3D* on his grandmother's birthday, April 22.

To some, Jenali Maleeq might resemble something that came from outer space. His sense of fashion is unique and not the norm for a brother of his size. Maleeq rocks the fitted look from his vests to his trousers, sports mohawks and multicolored hair, and seals it up with his signature bow tie. This isn't just his stage look; it's, as he describes, "life imitating art imitating life."

"I've found a way to embrace and love the self that I am," he says. "It's hard for some people to accept who they want to be. I've always had reservations about not wanting to do certain things as far as my appearance was concerned because I was always afraid of what people would think. I've even had people tell me I shouldn't have these crazy hair colors if you want to sing in church." But Maleeq has another agenda regarding his fashion. "I want people to remember me after they see me one time. If you can't remember my name, you'll remember that's the guy with the wild mohawk or that's the guy with the funky bow tie."

Surprisingly, Maleeq still gets thrown into the hip-hop genre no matter how he tries to switch up his music or his look. Even if he was strictly a rapper, Maleeq vows, "I refuse to present myself with my jeans hanging off my ass. I'd rather someone call me a rock star before they call me a typical hip-hop artist." He's still a big lover of hip-hop and pays homage with his "Maleeq" character on *Planet 3D*. "I came up on hip-hop. I'm a big fan of LL Cool J, Q-Tip, Talib Kweli, Common, Lauryn Hill—*Miseducation* is definitely a classic. [But] I'm not really sure where [rap is] going right now. There's definitely a big change from what it was back in the '90s."

Aside from his hip-hop heroes, Donny Hathaway is the one artist that has been most influential. "Outside of my grandmother, he's on the top of the list. Everything about him—his story, his voice—means a lot to me," he says. Maleeq is such a Hathaway purist that he refuses to record a cover of his idol's hits. "I get upset when people cover his songs. It's that deep."

With all that passion, dedication and imagination, Jelani Maleeq's *Planet 3D* is destined to be a winner.

Billie's Black continued from page 17

***SWERV: Is that something you're proud of?***
AF: Yes, indeed! I think we are one of two openly gay establishments here in Harlem. You know it's known but not necessarily celebrated by our community as a whole ... sort of "don't ask, don't tell." However, I'm happy that customers come in and may have heard that Billie's is gay-owned and not necessarily a gay restaurant (and I really don't know what a "gay" restaurant is for that matter!) and it doesn't affect their experience one way or the other. Customers just enjoy what they get here and I'm very proud of that because it means I've succeeded in reaching my goal for Billie's.

***SWERV: Have you experienced any backlash because of Billie's being gay-owned and gay-friendly?***
AF: We haven't had any backlash other than customers who may be ignorant about the gay community and often the result is they just decide not to frequent our establishment. Of course it's their choice, but that means they just miss out on our great food, live entertainment, and other events that include everyone.

***SWERV: Are you on any Harlem business committees? Do you support nonprofit work?***
AF: Let's see... I'm a member of the Harlem Arts Alliance, Harlem Business Alliance and am a certified Minority / Women's Business Enterprise (MBE). In 2010, I was a member of the founding board of Harlem Pride, Harlem's first official gay pride organization. Additionally, Billie's has hosted Pmyner's "Speak Your Myne" open mic poetry series, providing a space for LGBT artists to share their poetry and music. We also hosted the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) "Touched" photo exhibit and reception, and we're in discussions with other local organizations to support them as well. We're always looking to bring events and programs that support a variety of causes to Billie's Black, especially those that focus on gay youth and issues around HIV / AIDS.

***SWERV: I have to ask. What's your favorite dish on the Billie's Black menu?***
AF: Everything!

***SWERV: Ha! Everything? Spoken like a true owner!***
AF: Seriously, everything! However, the most popular dishes are the catfish, which is so good some of our customers have called it "crackfish" because it's so addictive. We're also known for our "You Wrong for That" (which again is what some of our customers call it) Mac n' Cheese. These names were given by customers that come from all over the country to sample these dishes. Once they have the food, they come right back for more, which is great!

***SWERV: Wait... "You Wrong for That" Mac n Cheese? (laughs) What makes that so special?***
AF: Ha! We cook everything fresh with four cheeses, a delicious variety of seasonings and ingredients, and the love and care I learned from my family early on watching them in the kitchen. Even if we gave you the full recipe, you couldn't duplicate it, so you must come to Billie's and experience it!

***SWERV: What's in the future for Billie's Black?***
AF: I'm working for Billie's to be a place for our customers to have a satisfying experience all around. In addition to our dine-in service, we're growing our catering business so we're excited at the prospects of that. We are also an art exhibit space for some of New York's new and established artists and are booking shows for the year. So when you're in New York, come by and experience a "love affair" with Billie's Black—great food, wonderful service, welcoming ambiance and exciting entertainment!

Billie's Black Bar/Lounge/Restaurant
271 West 119th St. (between Frederick Douglass Blvd. and St. Nicholas Ave.)
New York, NY 10026
212-280-2248
http://www.billiesblack.com
facebook: billiesblack
twitter: #billiesblack

George Walker continued from page 21

Walker believes that training and awareness is important for those who want to be elected and those who already have been elected. He encourages participants to take advantage of existing knowledge and practices, believing that it will enable them to make credible stances based on solid principles. "That's what leadership is about, and it is what we need," says Walker.

When asked what trends he's seen with African-American candidates and their campaigns since he started working with the Victory Fund and Leadership Institute several years ago, Walker noted the increase in number of those getting involved, and what he believes to be less overt homophobia in campaigns. As a result, he says candidates can be more perceptive about how to make their sexual orientation or gender identity a less divisive issue in campaigns and keep voters focused on their credentials and ability to do an effective job in office.

"Too many in our movement now know better than to stay in the closet, and we should not give passes or be complicit in holding the closet door in place," he says. "Some of our best stories involve courage. Be true and honest; it isn't just courageous, you feel better!"

Twenty years after the success of Sherry Harris, African-American GLBT people continue to take courageous steps in the area of politics. Thanks to the work of the Victory Fund, we are sure to see the success of many more to come.

To learn more about the Victory Fund, visit www.victoryfund.org; to find out about upcoming campaign and candidate trainings, visit www.glli.org.

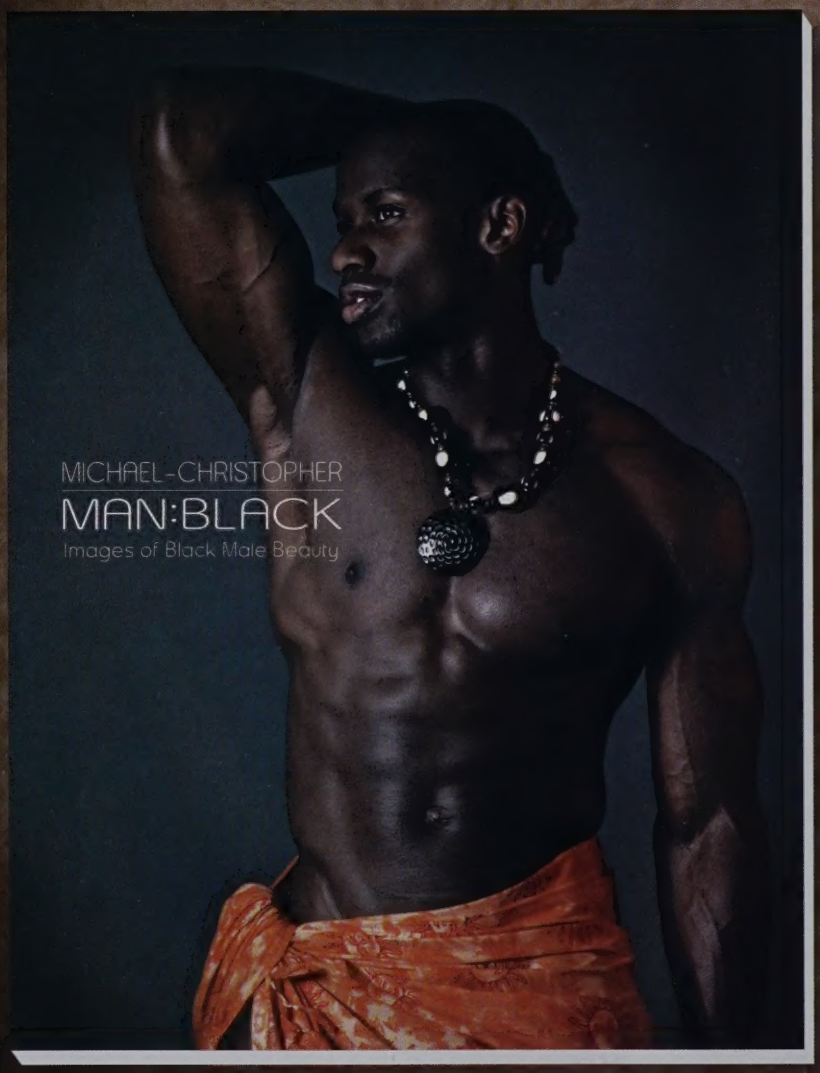
Available now at michael-christopher.com

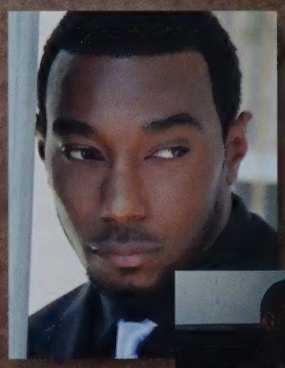
MC BOOKS

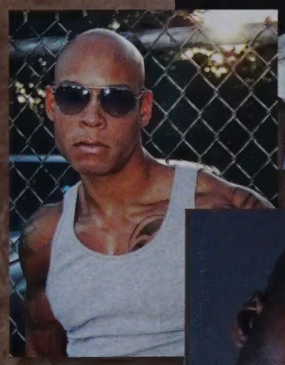
# MAN:BLACK

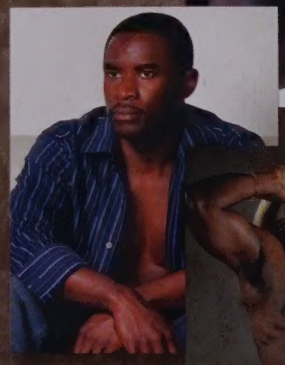
## Images of Black Male Beauty

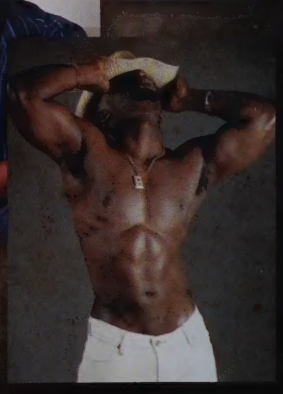
### Photographs by Michael-Christopher









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Black never looked so good! Michael-Christopher has captured the true essence of the ebony male in his first collection of artistic photographs. Simply titled, *MAN: BLACK*, this full-color, 100-page collection features breathtaking images illustrating the sensuality and strength of black men.

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# Soulful

(From the poetry book *Soul-Full* by Leo Shelton)

Heart stabbing songs
Rippling like jazz
Flowing with a blush
Into puckered lips
Landing exactly
Where they should

Silky smooth hooks
Like the petal of roses
Touching your face
Then neck... Then ...
Piercing thorns
Strike like x-lovers words
Never missing a beat....

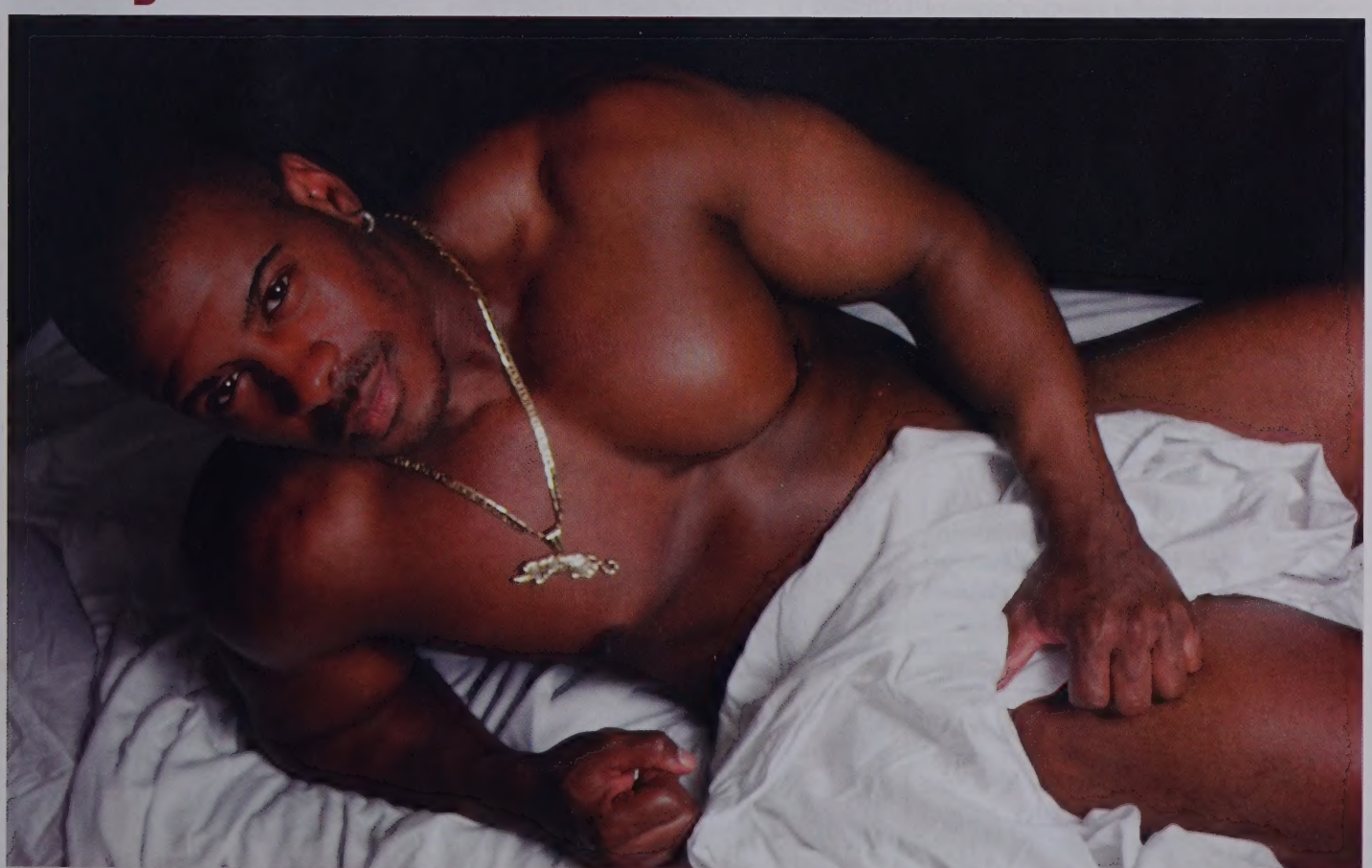
Tight buzzes
Reminiscent of first high's
And your last cry
Like the last glass of kool aid
Or the last piece of pie
Pressed and regressed
But moved... To keep moving
And move on....

Strange but familiar
Stories
Of life's connections
Those that make you strong
Make hearts long
And spirits laugh
And live, and grow
Even more

Unique prose
Mused in beats
Like comfortable seats
That take you nowhere but places you've been
Na'mean
And that's the magic
The music
The rips...
The mood
The mode
The new and the old ...
Now, that's SOUL...
FULL!

# Body of Art

"Mike" Taken from the photography book *The Framework: ReDefining Masculinity*
Courtesy of X-Clusive Image Enterprise (www.x-clusiveimage.com)



# swerv News

## HUD unveils proposed housing protections for LGBT people

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) today announced proposed housing-related regulatory changes explicitly protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people. Data from the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and National Center for Transgender Equality's forthcoming survey on transgender discrimination in the United States was cited as evidence demonstrating the dire need for housing protections for the transgender community.

The new rules would provide definitions for sexual orientation and gender identity for HUD programs and services; prohibit the owners or landlords of housing that is either HUD-assisted or HUD-insured from asking an applicant about sexual orientation or gender identity; prevent lenders of a mortgage insured by HUD from discriminating based on the real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity of applicants; and make clear that participation in HUD-supported housing programs, like the Section 8 voucher program, is available to LGBT families who meet other qualification requirements.

*Source: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*

## Hospital visitation policy protecting same-sex couples takes effect

Federal regulations on hospital visitation have taken effect, protecting same-sex couples in hospital settings across the country. The new regulations apply to all hospitals receiving funds from the federal government under the Medicaid and Medicare programs for the needy and elderly. Under the regulations, hospitals may not place any restrictions on visitation based on sexual orientation. In addition, the hospitals must inform each patient of his or her right to receive visitors designated by the patient, "including, but not limited to, a spouse, a domestic partner (including a same-sex domestic partner), another family member or a friend." Any hospital found to violate the new rules risks losing a major source of revenue.

*Source: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*

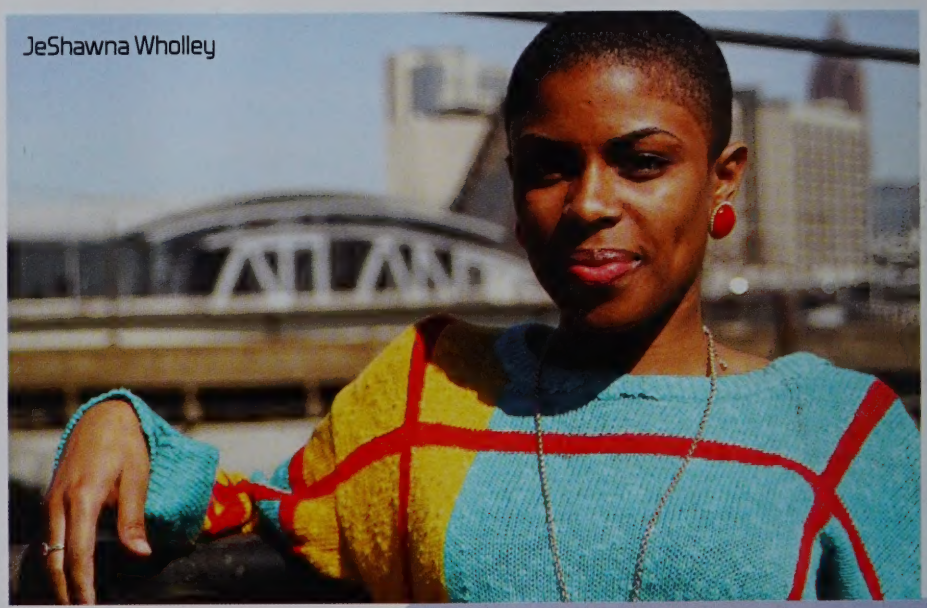
## Spelman student activist wins national leadership award

JeShawna Wholley, former president of Afrekete, Spelman's LGBTQ student organization, has been honored as the recipient of the 2011 Campus Pride Voice & Action National Leadership Award for her tireless efforts to make Spelman College and the Atlanta University Center (AUC) a more inclusive environment for the HBCU's queer student body. The award was created to acknowledge the vital role of young adult leaders in the present and for the future of the LGBT rights movement. After being selected as one of the top 12 leaders by peers on the Campus Pride Youth Advisory Board, she was bestowed the top honor by the official Campus Pride selection committee for her voice and action in the push for LGBT fairness and equality.

Having served as the president of Afrekete for two years, Wholley was credited with a number of accomplishments during her tenure. In 2009, alongside Morehouse's Safe Space organization, she spearheaded the first PRIDE Week in the AUC. The week's culminating event, themed "WERK: The Appropriate Dress Drag Show," aimed to create an awareness pertaining to the discriminatory nature of the Appropriate Attire Policy imposed by Morehouse College in 2009. This act afforded her honors by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC), which led to the opportunity to meet President Obama at a White House reception to commemorate Stonewall's 40th anniversary.

## Congresswoman Barbara Jordan featured on stamp

With the 34th stamp in the Black Heritage series, the Postal Service honors Barbara Jordan, one of the most respected and influential American politicians of the 20th century. The stamp goes on sale in September.



JeShawna Wholley

Her prodigious list of "firsts" includes being the first African-American woman elected to the Texas legislature, the first African-American elected to the Texas State Senate since 1883, and the first African-American woman elected to the U.S. Congress from the South.

She captured the attention and admiration of the nation with her intelligence and integrity, her ardent patriotism and steadfast dedication to public service, and her eloquent oratory and charismatic leadership.

The media did not report her sexual orientation as a lesbian until after her death in 1996 from pneumonia stemming from complications from leukemia. She was in a long-term relationship with a woman, Nancy Earl, for more than 20 years, but never came out publicly in her lifetime.

## Kick receives $180K Arcus Foundation grant

Kick, the Detroit-based agency for LGBT African Americans, was recently awarded a $180,000 grant from the Arcus Foundation. The two-year grant will be used to hire staff, move to a new business site and fund operations. As a direct result of the grant, Kick was able to hire longtime volunteer Curtis Lipscomb as its first paid full-time executive director in January; Kick also established a new office, The Center in Detroit, in the Tech Town business district just north of Wayne State University.

"The board of directors of Kick is thrilled to be afforded this opportunity," says Tiffany McLean, board president. "We look forward to better serving the LGBT African-American community. The Arcus grant offers the opportunity to interact with more members of the community and to further establish us as a premier agency serving LGBT African Americans." Kick anticipates Arcus' support to diminish over time and be replaced with new philanthropic partners and an expanded individual and corporate donor base.

Kick's mission is to increase awareness of and support to Detroit's dynamic lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender culture through education and advocacy with integrity and pride. The Arcus Foundation is a leading global foundation advancing pressing social justice and conservation issues. Specifically, Arcus works to advance LGBT equality, as well as to conserve and protect the great apes.

Kick has long relied on their former volunteer's assistance. "Key to our success is the leadership of Curtis Lipscomb, who last October participated in a panel discussion with the NAACP, held during Freedom Week and the annual Freedom Fund Dinner, discussing LGBT concerns and our connectivity to the broader civil rights agenda," says Antonio Johnson, treasurer of Kick. "He also publishes quarterly briefs addressing national and global issues that impact people of color within the LGBT community, and regularly participates in national LGBT panels and workshops."

"This grant will help to further answer the question, 'what does Kick do?'" says Lewis Smith, general counsel of Kick. "By strengthening and expanding core operations under the guardianship of seasoned activist Curtis Lipscomb, Kick can continue to meet and exceed its objectives and mission."

Curtis Lipscomb

Kick aims to make The Center in Detroit an exciting and highly visible symbol for Detroit's LGBT community, serving diverse social, recreational, cultural and social service needs of adults in a safe, welcoming and nurturing environment. It will be an office and meeting space for community organizations, cultural programming and development, and a small recreational space.

In partnership with local mental and physical clinicians, social service providers, and allies, Kick will reach its goal to strengthen Detroit's African American LGBT community through identification and engagement, strengthen the overall health and well-being of the African American LGBT community, and provide leadership to the African American LGBT community by modeling civic engagement and community building.

The Center in Detroit is located at the Graphic Arts Loft, 41 Burroughs St. in Detroit; move-in date is March 1, 2011. Hours of operation and activities will be announced shortly. For more information about Kick, visit www.e-kick.org or call 313-285-9733.

**March 25-28, 2011**
**"In the Thick of the Night"**
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The weekend promises to be filled with fun, friendship, fraternizing and hot big brothas. Relax by the pool, or join one of our many group activities. Release on the dance floor, or relate with your other big brothas and those who love them.
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**April 1-3, 2011**
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Contact: Rodgerick Bradley
E-mail: austinrelaypride@gmail.com/phone: 512-929-0322

**April 2, 2011**
**Brown Sugah Bash Arts Explosion Presents:**
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Have a laugh with comedian Karen Williams in Washington, D.C. Tickets $25 in advance/$30 at the door. Held at The ARC, 1901 Mississippi Ave. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20020. Show starts at 7 p.m. Purchase tickets www.thearcdc.org/events/upcoming.

**April 13-17, 2011**
**We Are 1 Conference**
**Durham, NC**
The We Are 1 conference mission is to host events and activities that will provide the resources that will empower individuals to handle the difficulties that life may bring while enriching their minds, encouraging their hearts and uplifting their souls. Separate sessions are held for men and women.
www.weare1organization.org

**April 24 - May 1, 2011**
**Philadelphia Black Gay Pride**
Contact: Chris Alston
E-mail: phillyblackpride@gmail.com/phone: 877-497-pbgp
www.phillyblackpride.org

**May 12-15, 2011**
**Sweetheat 2011**
**The South Beach Pride for Women**
**Miami, FL**
Over 8,000 African-American and Hispanic women come together for this one-of-a-kind party!
www.sweetheatmiami.net

**May 19-21, 2011**
**2011 MCC People of African Descent Conference**
**Washington, DC**
Metropolitan Community Churches host this annual conference featuring workshops and keynote speakers focusing on physical, political, and spiritual health and wholeness.
www.ufmcc.com

# ON THE SCENE

**The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force hosted its 23rd National Conference on LGBT Equality: Creating Change in Minnesota on February 2-6. Over 2,500 attendees participated in over 250 workshops and training sessions with topics ranging from HIV/AIDS, marriage equality, faith and spirituality and racial justice. For more visit www.thetaskforce.org.**

*1. U.S. Representative, Keith Ellison (D-MN) 2. Presenters Moses Kushaba, Rev. Rebecca Voelkel, Frank Mugisha, Rev. Canon Albert Ogle 3. Rea Carey, Executive Director, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*

**Tell us about your event! E-mail us at info@swervmag.com.**

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**MORE AT THE DOOR**

**FOOD • CASH BAR • GUEST DJ**
**FASHION SHOW • BEST DRESSED CONTEST**

PHILADELPHIA BLACK GAY PRIDE
2011

SUNDAY APRIL 24
Mr & Miss PBGB
Gershwin Levitt Theater

MONDAY APRIL 25
Town Hall Meeting
Location: TBA

TUESDAY APRIL 26
Black Sensations
Philly Ethical Society

WEDNESDAY APRIL 27
Bowl with Pride @ PEP Bowl

THURSDAY APRIL 28
One Night Stand-Open Mic
Marathon Restaurant

Parties at various location

FRIDAY APRIL 29
12th Annual Meet & Greet

Midnight Movie Madness
Doubletree Hotel

Parties at various locations

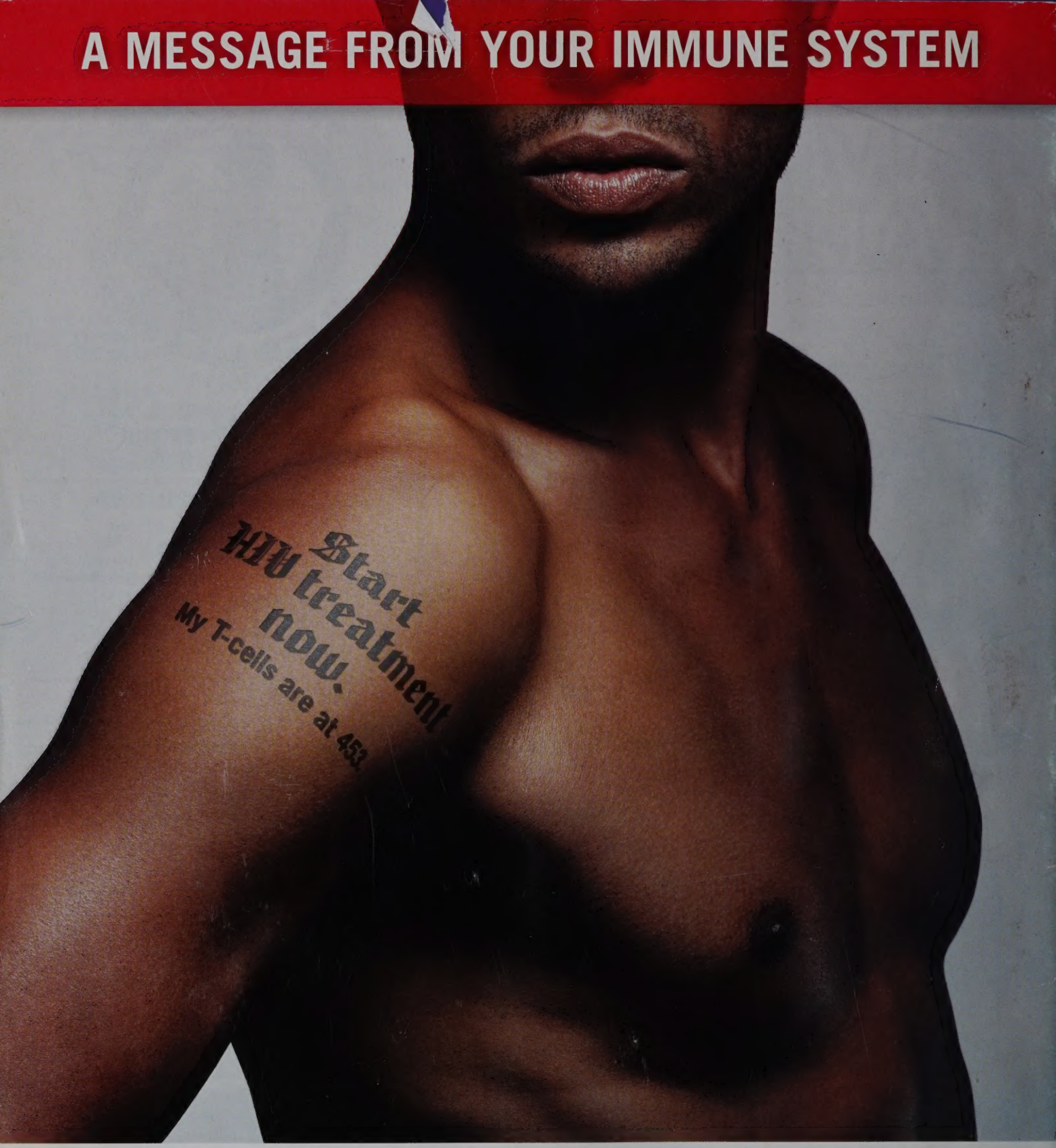
SATURDAY APRIL 30
Pride Workshops

Speed Dating
Doubletree Hotel

Parties at various locations

for more info
www.phillyblackpride.org

# A MESSAGE FROM YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM




GILEAD

## Talk with your doctor about ways to help protect your immune system.

HIV treatment is now recommended for everyone with a T-cell count of 500 or less and should be considered when T-cells are higher than 500, according to the DHHS* and the IAS-USA†, along with other factors. Starting treatment early may help protect your immune system and vital organs. Today's medicines may have fewer, more manageable side effects. They may help you live a longer, healthier life. Receive helpful information about living with HIV that you should know. Call toll free 1-888-447-1826, or visit **TREATHIVNOW.COM**.

*DHHS = Department of Health and Human Services †IAS-USA = International AIDS Society USA. ©2011 Gilead Sciences, Inc. All rights reserved. UN7534 03/11